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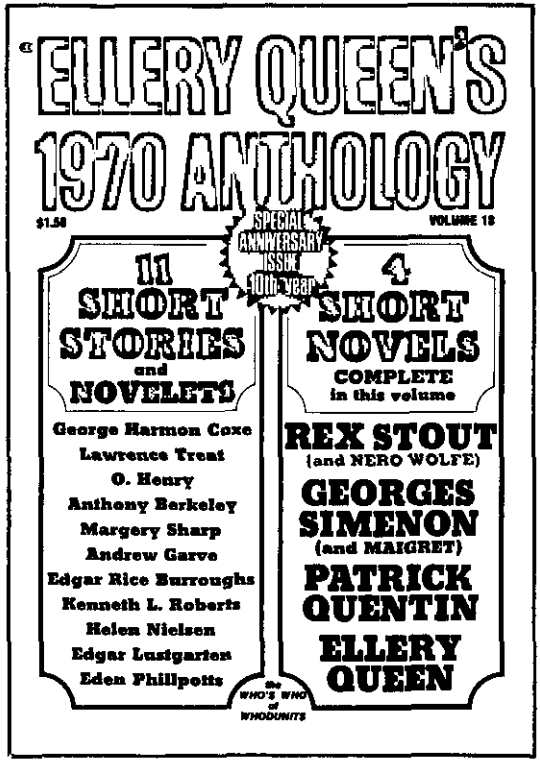

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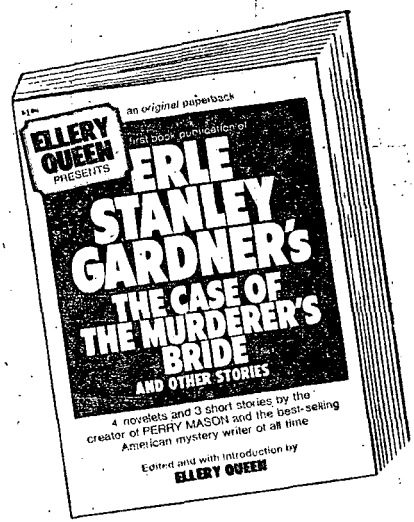
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THE DOLLAR CHASERS — Earl Derr Biggers — 17-98

NEW DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

THE MURDER GAME — Nedra Tyre — 6

MISS PAISLEY ON A DIET — John Pierce — 52

THE ABC CODE — John Abbott — 76

ADVENTURE OF THE DOG IN THE KNIGHT — Robert L. Fish — 88

NEW CRIME SHORT STORIES

ONE CASE IN A MILLION — Gerald Kersh — 48

THE THEFT OF THE LAUGHING LIONS — Edward D. Hoch — 64

SPREADEAGLE AND SCRAM — Stephen Barr — 80

GOODBYE TO FRANCIE — Robert Twohy — 131

NEW SPY STORY

THE EMERGENCY EXIT AFFAIR — Michael Gilbert — 146

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 63

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — John Dickson Carr — 129

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a NEW detective story by

NEDRA TYRE

It was only a game, an innocent parlor game. True, it dealt with murders and suspects and clues—but it was only fun, only make-believe. Aunt Felicity was the one really responsible for the game—she had started the ritual and had insisted the game be played at every gathering of her nieces and nephews. Aunt Felicity was a witty, inventive old lady, and an excellent improviser. So when the desperate need arose, she turned the game into a deadly pastime . . .

Can you match wits with Aunt Felicity? Could she have depended on you to play her game successfully?

THE MURDER GAME

by NEDRA TYRE

IT WAS TIME FOR THE MURDER game.

To play it, my brothers and sisters and I, all six of us, were gathered as usual on the first Tuesday night of the month in our Aunt Felicity's huge and impressive bedroom which was big enough for a royal levee. From its high stuccoed ceiling hung two Venetian chandeliers. A vast canopied bed dominated one end of the room. We were sitting in the other end at small candlelit tables set in the bay window that overlooked the rolling expanse of lawn that swept down to the river.

We had finished eating a simple but superbly cooked dinner. Our three tables were grouped in a semicircle around the Recamier sofa on which Aunt Felicity, beautiful and elegant but badly crippled from arthritis, had half reclined as she ate from a tray.

I didn't like the foolish game, nor as far as I could see did my brothers and sisters; but five months previously Aunt Felicity had proposed it out of the blue, and she had been so kind to us, so loving and generous, that none

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of us dared protest at first, and by now it had become a monthly ritual.

Five of us were not the least bit good at parlor games. As children we hadn't played them. My three brothers were competitive and excellent sportsmen, and competitive in business and spectacular successes for such young men—Carl and Matthew were lawyers, but not partners, and Andrew was an investment banker. Alicia, our oldest sister, was competitive socially and the most prominent young hostess in the city; her parties were famous—people literally clawed each other for invitations to her balls.

However competitive my brothers and Alicia were in the professional and social worlds they were inept at Aunt Felicity's murder game.

Jeanine—next to me the youngest girl—always won the game. Always.

She was the scholar among us, the bright one. I don't think she had a competitive bone in her body, and she discounted the prodigious store of knowledge that she possessed. She was genuinely modest about it. Her attitude seemed to be that she could not take pride in having mastered some information when there was so much more to be acquired. All the same, I think it irked my brothers that the murder game was so easy for her.

I will describe the game as we played it. Perhaps it's a variation of a well-known game. As I say, we hadn't played parlor games either as children or adults. Previously we had only talked when we had dinner together on the first Tuesday of each month. We never ran out of things to say to each other. It was our one night together when there were no outsiders; not even our brothers' wives or Alicia's husband joined us.

When we had finished eating, Jeanine and I would clear away the dishes and pile them in the dumbwaiter and send them down to the kitchen where Mr. and Mrs. Finch were waiting for them. Our brothers would draw up chairs around Aunt Felicity. Alicia and I sat together on a loveseat, and Jeanine, as if to hide herself and her brightness and her inevitable triumph, sat in a small Louis XV chair behind our brothers.

The game began when Aunt Felicity reached into the drawer of a table near her and took out six sheets of rather ratty-looking scratch paper on which she had inscribed with a red nylon-tipped pen the first names of the persons suspected of murder; then she would tell us that the murdered person, before expiring, had been able to write something which indicated the name of the murderer, but that the murderer himself, or

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herself, intent on getting away from the scene of the crime, was not aware of having been incriminated, since the clever victim had been able to point to the murderer in an oblique way.

Aunt Felicity handed the sheets to Carl and he distributed them.

We read the names of the suspects: Horace, Llewellyn, Mary Ann, Joan, Louise, Margaret, Lawrence.

Before the victim died he had been able to scrawl one word: George.

Again Carl rose. Again he took six sheets from Aunt Felicity and handed them around to us. We now held a sheet with the names of the suspects in red and a sheet with the one word George in black.

We all—except for Jeanine, of course—began to frown in disgruntled perplexity.

Aunt Felicity asked if anyone had the solution. No one answered. She quizzed us in turn beginning with Carl who was nearest to her. When my time came I said I had no idea who was guilty. Occasionally Alicia would make a stab, but it was always a futile, incorrect one. And our brothers invariably became jocular, charming, bluffing, willing to take a chance, and on rare occasions one of them made a lucky guess, but he could never prove it by evidence or any sort of clue.

Aunt Felicity didn't let the game drag on or permit our brothers to become too rollicking with their random guesses. She would suddenly say, "Jeanine, who is the murderer?"

Tonight, as usual, Jeanine was neither coy nor hesitant in answering. Her voice was clear but modest. "The murderer is Mary Ann."

"That's right," Aunt Felicity said. "Now tell us why Mary Ann is the guilty one."

"Well, the victim wrote down George. George Eliot is the name under which Mary Ann Evans published her novels. Therefore George equals Mary Ann."

"Good lord," Matthew said. "I haven't thought about George Eliot since I was a freshman in high school and had to read *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*."

With Jeanine's naming the murderer our evening together was over. I gathered up the twelve pieces of paper we had used in the game and threw them into the wastebasket. My brothers and sisters lined up around the sofa and kissed Aunt Felicity good night and then they left me alone with her. We were an affectionate family, in touch with each other two or three times a day by telephone, and my brothers and their wives and Alicia and her husband and Jeanine, who wasn't married but lived on campus at

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a nearby university where she was an assistant curator in the Museum of Fine Arts, made numerous brief visits nearly every week.

My brothers relied on Aunt Felicity's advice and counsel and she relied on theirs. She had been our guardian ever since our parents had been killed in a plane crash, the same crash that had killed Aunt Felicity's husband. At the time of that tragedy Carl, the oldest child, had been twelve and I, Sue, the youngest, five. Aunt Felicity had taken us into her large house copied from an English manor and had given us a wonderful life, and by shrewd investments had made a substantial fortune for us out of our parents' estate, so that we were all well off financially when we came of age.

I had neither my brothers' drive for professional success nor Jeanine's brains nor Alicia's flair for society, and so I stayed with Aunt Felicity. She needed me, especially after she was stricken with arthritis. I found it satisfying to give back a little of the care and devotion she had given us. I did her errands and her telephoning. She found it difficult to dial or to hold the telephone, but liked to be in immediate and constant touch with people. I made dozens, sometimes scores, of calls for her every day. I invited her continuous flow of guests. She was a witty and informed conversationalist who liked to have witty people around her. I bought books for her to read, sent presents and flowers for her, got up at dawn to go to the farmers' market when Aunt Felicity wanted special food to prepare for a gourmet friend. I searched the shops for kaftans and long elegant dressing gowns that would hide Aunt Felicity's crippled body.

That night when my brothers and sisters had left after Jeanine had said that Mary Ann was the name of the murderer, I wanted to say as I helped Aunt Felicity make the painful, labored journey from the sofa to her bed, "Why do you have us play that silly game? Don't you see that none of us really likes it? And it embarrasses Jeanine to win all the time. I've never known you to make other guests ill at ease. Why don't you stop insisting that we play it?"

But I didn't complain.

And the game did end soon.

Or at least we were to be given a respite when Jeanine left town at the end of the semester. She took a brief leave from the university to spend the spring in Italy studying art in churches and museums.

I had thought that perhaps at our last gathering before Jeanine left, Aunt Felicity wouldn't make us play the game, but I was wrong.

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As always, when our meal was finished and the dishes were cleared away, Aunt Felicity told us to take our places for the game, and once we were settled she reached into the drawer and handed Carl the slips with the names of the suspects. Carl handed a slip to each of us and we read the names: Cleo, Annette, Josephine, Melissa, Maude; Frank, James, Warren.

Then came the sheet with the clue: a serpentine line, an irregular, lopsided S.

Andrew was brash and even before Aunt Felicity asked for volunteer answers he said, "The guilty person is Cleo. The clue that looks like an S is a serpent, the asp that caused Cleopatra's death. Cleopatra equals Cleo. Sorry, Jeanine, to end your unbroken streak of victories, especially on your last night."

"A very good guess," Aunt Felicity said. "But the name on the list of suspects is Cleo, not Cleopatra. Your answer is wrong."

After Andrew's gaffe no one else guessed or offered any kind of comment. It was, I think, the shortest game on record.

As always, Aunt Felicity turned to Jeanine and asked for the answer.

"The murderer is Josephine," Jeanine said. "The clue—the S—is the outline of a swan. The swan was Empress Josephine's motif or emblem or whatever you want to call it. She had swans embossed everywhere. So the swan equals Josephine and Josephine is the guilty one."

Aunt Felicity gave Jeanine a congratulatory smile.

Then we all kissed one another good night and wished Jeanine a wonderful trip.

And that, as it happened, was the last time that we ever played the game of murder.

The next week was frantic for me. Even more than usual the telephone was like an appendage, an extra limb I'd grown in order to function. Aunt Felicity gave a large reception for the curator taking Jeanine's place and introduced him to the young painters and writers in town. Then a famous conductor, an old friend of Aunt Felicity, arrived for a concert and Aunt Felicity invited him and his entire orchestra to a late supper party.

I had never made so many telephone calls or done so many errands, and the night after the supper party when I handed Aunt Felicity her dinner on a tray she insisted that I go to bed immediately.

"You look dead-tired," Aunt Felicity said. "I've imposed on you too much. I don't need you tonight. I'll have Finch come up for the tray and he can send any callers upstairs. If any of the children"—she still referred to my

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brothers and sisters and me as children—"come they have their own keys."

I glanced at the bedside table to be sure everything she needed was at hand. Two books of her two favorite poets—Keats and Gerard Manley Hopkins—were there; the sherry decanter beside them was full—Aunt Felicity liked to sip sherry as she read, the last thing she did before going to sleep.

"Sue, darling, everything I can possibly want is within reach," she said. "Now go and get some rest." She lifted her forehead toward me and I kissed it and we said good night.

Twelve hours of sleep was all I needed to give me back my energy.

I woke up the next morning feeling equal to a hundred telephone calls and errands. I bathed and dressed quickly, then went as usual into Aunt Felicity's room. I tidied up a bit and picked up the Hopkins book that had fallen to the floor and set it in its accustomed place beside the volume of Keats. I often found a book on the floor where it had fallen out of Aunt Felicity's hand when she had dozed off to sleep. I adjusted the shutters so that the sunlight streamed in.

Then I went to the bathroom and moistened a washcloth so that Aunt Felicity could sponge her face and hands. I leaned under the canopy and pushed back the heavy curtains of the bed and called to Aunt Felicity.

Her alert eyes did not look up at me.

She did not give me her usual radiant smile.

She was turned so that she seemed to be submerged, drowned in the deep mound of pillows.

I realized then that she was dead, but that did not keep me from repeating her name again and again, as if I might somehow arouse her; and then I compelled myself to do what must be done.

I made one telephone call after another that morning. The first one was to Dr. Cowan who came to the house immediately.

"Don't grieve for Felicity," he said as we stood beside her dead body, and even as he ordered me not to grieve I saw that he was weeping for his dear friend. "Every moment of her life was pain." He wiped his eyes and recovered his professionalism. "Her death seems a perfectly natural one. I'll examine her, of course. When you call your family and friends, just say that Felicity died in her sleep."

As I left the room to make the sad announcement, I saw Dr. Cowan stoop over her body.

Whatever he had said to me about not grieving for Aunt Felicity, I mourned for her. I knew that life was precious to her and that however acute her

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pain and the inconvenience of being an invalid, she considered them a small price to pay for the pleasure and exhilaration of living.

Carl and Andrew and Matthew and their wives and Alicia and her husband arrived within minutes after I telephoned them, a prelude to an invasion of friends and acquaintances. Soon the house was crowded with people. After some delay I had reached Jeanine in Florence and managed to convince her that there was no reason for her to come home for the funeral—Aunt Felicity wouldn't have wanted her to interrupt her studies.

Late that morning I went to the kitchen to brew more tea for the guests and Matthew was coming up from the cellar with four bottles of sherry to replenish the supply. He motioned me into the pantry out of hearing of Mrs. Finch and the maids preparing refreshments.

"Sue," he whispered, "she didn't leave one of those pieces of paper with a clue on it, did she?"

"What do you mean?"

"That game of murder meant so much to Aunt Felicity. Maybe she had a premonition that she was going to be killed. Maybe that's why she made us play it so that we could discover her murderer."

I couldn't answer Matthew. I stared at him. He might have said an obscenity over Aunt Felicity's body.

My lack of answer was evidently answer enough for Matthew. "I know it's far-fetched," he said. "I—well, my God, I suppose I'm crazy but I thought maybe she had been murdered. Whatever you do, don't mention my suspicions to the others."

And then Carl and Andrew in turn stalked me, each cornering me privately in that house teeming with callers and prodding me to learn whether Aunt Felicity had left a clue that might point to her murderer. My shock and disbelief made them back away with apologies. The suspicions appalled me; and each swore me to secrecy, none of them wanting his dark mistrust to be told to the others.

But when Alicia grabbed my arm and pulled me into the downstairs powder room and locked the door behind us and asked if Aunt Felicity had left a clue I was less shocked. I now had questions of my own.

"Who would be the suspects, Alicia?"

"Any of us. All of us."

"But why? Why on earth would any of us want to murder Aunt Felicity?"

"Money," Alicia said. "Aunt Felicity was very, very rich and she left her fortune to us."

"Money? We all have money

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of our own. We don't need Aunt Felicity's money."

"Don't be naive, Sue. No one ever has enough money. I happen to know that Andrew is desperate for ready cash, and Carl has a new love affair but his wife won't give him a divorce without stripping him of everything he owns. And Matthew—"

I held up my hand for her to stop talking.

"Little baby sister," she said, "you're much too unworldly. You've spent your adult life being an errand girl and making telephone calls. I didn't mean to upset you or to make monsters out of our brothers. Someone could have murdered Aunt Felicity out of pity. It was unbearable sometimes to watch her hopeless fight against pain. I've longed for her to die so that her suffering would be over."

"But, Alicia, how could she have been murdered?"

"I don't know. Maybe an overdose of sleeping pills or something else put into her sherry. We all knew she drank it before going to sleep."

I slumped into the chair at the dressing table.

"Stop looking so horror-struck," Alicia ordered. "And get up out of that chair. We've guests to attend to. Come on."

At last Aunt Felicity's house was empty of all the callers; my brothers and sister, about to leave, insisted I not spend the night alone; each invited me to be an overnight guest.

"Alone?" I said. "I'm not alone. Mr. and Mrs. Finch are here. I want to stay where I belong—in Aunt Felicity's house."

I had no intention of leaving, and I was relieved finally to close the front door on my brothers and Alicia and go to my room.

It had been a long difficult day and the night was almost over. I needed rest for the approaching funeral and all the details that would precede and follow it.

But I could not sleep.

Seemingly the only thing alive in that dark and silent house was my small bedside clock and its regular tick and its illuminated hands that kept circling around and around as the slow and sleepless hours marched past.

Then a breeze swirled up from the front door and ascended the stairway and turned the corridor and swept into my room, and the most cautious footsteps I ever heard mounted the stairs and eased into Aunt Felicity's room.

And I knew that either Carl or Matthew or Andrew or Alicia was searching there for a sheet of paper bearing a clue that would point to Aunt Felicity's murderer. They had been right to be suspicious. I was, as Alicia had said, the naive one.

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Aunt Felicity's game of murder had been played all along for a real purpose.

But I tried to persuade myself that the darkness and my tiredness had exaggerated everything, that I had only imagined the breeze that had entered with the opening of the front door. I could not have heard any footsteps—the chatter of the clock would have muffled them.

But perhaps I ought to make sure.

Perhaps I ought to get up and look into Aunt Felicity's room.

Then above the ticking of the clock I heard descending footsteps and then the front door opened and closed.

There was still time for me to find out who had come in. I could rush to the entrance and see whose car was driving away.

Then I told myself that surely our loving family had not bred a murderer. Whoever had entered had only wanted to check to be sure that Aunt Felicity had not left a clue; it was not a murderer intent on destroying a clue. Aunt Felicity's game of murder had only been an innocent pastime with the slight moral purpose of proving Jeanine's superiority over Matthew's and Carl's and Andrew's and Alicia's worldliness and my aimlessness.

That idea reassured me and I managed to fall asleep.

But I was not reassured when I awoke. My one resolution was to play out the murder game.

I had never liked the game, but that didn't matter now. For once I must be adept at it. Jeanine, the only one good at the game, was thousands of miles away, and if Aunt Felicity had left a clue she would have meant it for me. She knew I wasn't subtle like Jeanine, so she would have left a clue easy for me to decipher.

I went resolutely into Aunt Felicity's room.

The last time I had been in there I had found her dead body.

But before I had discovered she was dead I had gone about the ordinary morning routine. I had picked up a book of poetry from the floor and had set it on the bedside table where it was now. I had opened the shutters and had gone to the bathroom to dampen a washcloth.

I looked around me.

Nothing about the room resembled itself. The bed with its hangings seemed almost pretentious, the tambour organdy curtains looked too stiff, the French sofas and armchairs belonged to a stage set, the chandeliers should light a palace ballroom, the paintings ought to hang in a museum.

Without Aunt Felicity's presence the room had lost its elegance, all its personality.

I walked over to the small table near the Recamier sofa from which Aunt Felicity had taken,

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as she began the murder game, the sheets listing the names of the suspects. The drawer contained pads of scratch paper. I fluttered through them, but I could find nothing written on any sheet.

Then I realized that if Aunt Felicity were in the last moments of her life and aware of her predicament she must certainly have been in bed, and would have had no way to make the arduous journey from her bed to the table and back again without help, which she could surely not have requested of her murderer.

So she would have left the clue near or in the bed.

But the bedside table had nothing to offer. The books of poetry and the sherry decanter and wine glasses were on it. Inside the top drawer were my aunt's cosmetics and medicines. The bottom drawer held stationery and various pens and pencils, but everything was innocent of the clue in Aunt Felicity's handwriting for which I was searching.

I pulled back the bedcovers. No doubt Mrs. Finch had changed the sheets after Aunt Felicity's death and had dislodged the clue if Aunt Felicity had left it in the bed. Mrs. Finch would have thrown it in the trash if it had fluttered out at her. I found nothing in the bedsheets or stuffed under the mattress or in any of the pillowcases.

There was no clue.

Or if there had been one the early morning visitor had found it and removed it.

But I will not give up.

I looked again at the collections of poetry. I picked up the Keats book and riffled its pages. There was nothing in it. I put it back and took up the Hopkins book; the only extraneous thing in it was a small piece of paper that marked Aunt Felicity's reading place.

I snatched the paper. It was not identical in size to the pads of scratch paper which Aunt Felicity used for the murder game, but it did not need to be. A single word was written on it with the black nylon-tipped pen that Aunt Felicity always used when she wrote down the clues.

The word was TERENCE.

I said the name aloud. It was vaguely familiar. Terence was a writer of antiquity, wasn't he? I didn't know. I didn't have Jeanine's fund of information. Holding the sheet of paper, I ran downstairs to the library and pulled a biographical dictionary from a shelf. " 'Terrence,' I read. 'Publius Terentius Afer C. 190-159 B.C.' " My eyes raced down the rest of the entry but I paid no attention to what I was reading. It was of no use to me. Aunt Felicity would have known I couldn't make deductions from a literary reference. She would have made it easier for me.

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But however simple or easy she might have thought she was making it she had not made it simple enough or clear enough for me.

Terence.

Terence.

Terence.

It meant absolutely nothing.

The telephone rang, summoning me to all the duties and details attendant on Aunt Felicity's funeral.

It was Mr. Frame, Aunt Felicity's attorney, telling me that the undertaker had tentatively arranged for the service to be held at two the next afternoon if it would be satisfactory with us. He asked me to telephone Alicia and my brothers and then to let the undertaker know.

I would telephone them and then I would call Dr. Cowan and ask if Aunt Felicity could possibly have been murdered. I would tell him I thought that as Aunt Felicity had grown drowsier and drowsier after her last caller had left she realized that the caller had put something lethal in her sherry when it was poured out for her, and that just before she died she had managed to write something that incriminated the caller and had put the slip of paper in a book just before it fell out of her hand.

First, though, I must telephone about the time of the funeral.

As always I began with Carl, since he was the oldest.

His telephone was busy, so I called Matthew. Two o'clock was satisfactory with him. I called Carl again, but his line was still busy. So I dialed Alicia and then Andrew; each said the hour was agreeable.

Carl was the only one left to question and his line was still busy; I kept dialing.

And then I realized that Aunt Felicity *had* made it simple for me.

Terence.

My finger, plucking at numbers, had also been dialing letters of the alphabet, and Carl's number was 837-3623.

I wanted the line to stay busy forever, but on my next try Carl answered. I told him the proposed hour of Aunt Felicity's funeral and, as with the others, it was all right with him.

Then I said, "Carl, Aunt Felicity did leave a clue. I found it a little while ago. The clue she wrote was Terence. It was directed at me because I use the telephone so much. When I dialed your number—837-3623—I also dialed T-E-R-E-N-C-E. As Jeanine would say, Terence equals Carl. You killed Aunt Felicity."

There was a long pause and then a sound I had never heard on a telephone. I thought at first that a door might have slammed, but then I heard my sister-in-law scream and I knew that Carl had shot himself.

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a mystery-detective ***SHORT NOVEL*** by

EARL DERR BIGGERS

complete in this issue

The series-detective "hat trick" is now a quintuple achievement: magazine appearance, book publication, motion picture, radio, and television. Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan has performed the "hat trick" in grand style. That "patient, aphoristic Chinese-Hawaiian-American" sleuth has been the protagonist of six excellent novels, all of which were serials in "The Saturday Evening Post"; and from these six stories, by the miracle of Hollywood, have come at least 40 full-length movies starring, among others, Warner Oland and Sidney Toler; in addition, from the same seemingly inexhaustible six novels, Charlie Chan became a weekly crimebuster on the air waves, and more recently, through the revival of the old movies, a TV favorite with devotees of the "Early Show," the "Great Show," the "Great Great Show," the "Late Show," the "Late Late Show," the "Million Dollar Movie" (no longer an impressive title in these inflationary days), "The Flick," and the "Best of Broadway." And, we are informed, there are new movies in the work, and Charlie Chan commercial tie-ups are being planned (pillows, posters—what, no chow mein or egg rolls?), and a TV "Special" is under way. TV commercials (for Volkswagen) have already appeared, and all six novels have been reissued in paperback. Thus, the name of Charlie Chan, long a "household word," is being perpetuated . . .

We wish we could bring you a Charlie Chan story, but alas, there are only the six full-length novels, no more, no less. Mr. Biggers never wrote a Charlie Chan short story, novelet, or short novel. We remember corresponding with Mr. Biggers, back

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in the old "Mystery League" days, asking him—no, pleading with him—to write at least one Charlie Chan short story for posterity (and for anthology editors). But Mr. Biggers replied that if he could hit on a satisfactory plot idea for a Charlie Chan short, he would not squander it on 5000 or 10,000 or even 20,000 words; he would expand the idea to a 60,000-to-70,000-word novel. It was an argument we could not refute: like his beloved Confucius-oriented detective, Mr. Biggers was essentially a practical man . . .

But—

We *can* give you a Biggers surprise.

We have found a relatively "unknown" Biggers short novel that has long been out of print, and it is a pleasure and privilege to rescue it from biblivion. *The Dollar Chasers* was first published in 1924; but, as you will discover, the passing of time—of nearly a generation and a half—has not added a single wrinkle or gray hair to the story. (How many so-called "serious" authors can make that statement about their early work?) This short novel is almost as fresh a detective daisy today as it was 46 years ago!

True, there are small evidences of the termiting of time: reporters no longer work for fifty dollars a week; a large bundle of wash including shirts no longer can be laundered and ironed for one dollar; and most men no longer wear detachable collars. But these, you'll admit, are trivia: more important, multimillionaires and luck pieces are still with us, in fact and fiction; young girls are still attractive and romance still blooms, in fact and fiction; and even more important to our 'tec text, the baffling mystery has never grown old, and lighthearted detection, twistings of plot, unflagging action, and a humorous and genuinely charming style—none of these have aged; and these are the priceless ingredients of entertainment you now have in d e l i g h t f u l prospect. . .

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THE DOLLAR CHASERS

by EARL DERR BIGGERS

IT WAS A LOVELY, CALM EVENING in San Francisco, and the sun was going down on Simon Porter's wrath. An old habit of the sun's—often it rose to find Simon in an equally turbulent mood, for twenty years of daily newspaper editing had jangled Simon's nerves and wrath sprang eternal in his human breast.

He crossed the city room in his quest of the youngest—and, as it happened, the ablest—of his reporters. The young man he sought was seated before one of the copy-desk telephones, gazing fondly into the transmitter and speaking honeyed words.

"Say, that's mighty kind of you, Sally . . . No, haven't heard about it yet, but I probably will . . . Tomorrow night at six. Pier 99. I'll be there. And I may add that in the interval, time will go by on lagging feet. No, I said lagging. It's poetry. See you tomorrow, Sally. Goodby."

He turned to meet the chill eye of his managing editor.

"Ah," Simon Porter said, "so you call her Sally."

"Yes, sir," Bill Hammond answered respectfully. "It saves time."

"Does old Jim Batchelor know how you address his only child?"

"Probably not. He's a busy man."

"He'll be a lot busier when he hears about you. He'll have you boiled in oil. A newspaper reporter at fifty a week!"

"A mere pittance," Bill Hammond agreed.

"All you're worth," added the editor hastily. "I suppose the girl told you. I begin to see now. The whole idea came from her, didn't it?"

"She mentioned a delightful possibility," said the reporter. "However, I take my orders from you."

Simon Porter relapsed into wrath.

"Gives me about enough reporters to get out a good high-school magazine," he cried. "And then sends one of them off on a picnic to please a girl!"

"Yes, sir," put in Bill Hammond brightly.

"I'm speaking of our respected owner. He's just called up—you're to go aboard Jim Batchelor's yacht for a week-end cruise to Monterey. Golf at Del Monte and Pebble Beach; and if there's

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anything else you want, ask for it. The launch will be at Pier 99 tomorrow evening at six. But you know all this."

"It sounds more authentic when you say it, sir."

"Bah! It's an assignment. I don't suppose she told you that."

"No, sir. She didn't mention sordid things."

"There's been an Englishman named Mikklesen afflicting this town for the past week. He's just back from ten years in the Orient and he isn't fond of the Chinese. Neither is Jim Batchelor. Neither is our beloved owner. You're to listen to Mikklesen talk and write up his opinions."

"Sounds easy," commented Bill Hammond.

"It's a cinch. Listening to Mikklesen talk is what those who hang round with him don't do nothing else but. All rot though. With real news breaking every minute—and me short of men!"

He started to move away.

"Er—I presume I don't come in tomorrow," suggested the reporter.

His chief glared at him. "Who says you don't? That line you got off about time going by on lagging feet—you spoke too soon. It won't lag. I'll attend to that—personally. You report tomorrow as usual."

"Yes, sir," answered Bill Hammond meekly. A hard man, he reflected.

"And listen to me." The managing editor retraced his steps. "About this Sally Batchelor—I suppose she's easy to look at?"

"No trouble at all."

"Well, you keep your mind on your work." His expression softened. "Not a chance in the world, my lad. Old Jim Batchelor couldn't see you with the telescope over at Lick Observatory. It's money, money, money with him."

"So I've heard."

"He's still got the first dollar he ever earned. He'll show it to you. Where is the first dollar you earned?"

"Somebody," said Bill Hammond, "got it away from me."

"Precisely. That's where you and old Jim are different. I'm telling you. I don't want to see a good reporter go wrong."

"A good reporter, sir?"

"That's what I said."

Bill Hammond smiled. It brightened the corner where he was.

"Tomorrow," he ventured, "is Friday—the day before the paycheck."

"I'll give you an order on the cashier," said Simon. He wrote on a slip of paper and handed it over.

"Twenty-five dollars!" Bill Hammond read. "And I was thinking of a yachting suit!"

Simon Porter smiled grimly. "You take your other shirt and go aboard. Your role is not to

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dazzle. I've just got through telling you."

And he strode away to the cubbyhole where he did his editing.

His departure left Bill Hammond alone in the city room for this was an evening paper and the last edition was on the street. Jim Batchelor's prospective guest remained seated at the copy desk. He was, to judge from his expression, doing a bit of thinking. Some of his thoughts appeared to be pleasant ones, while others were not. The grave mingled with the gay, and this had been true of his reveries ever since that exciting day when he first met Sally Batchelor.

Sent by his paper to cover a charity fete for the benefit of some orphanage, he had caught his first glimpse of Sally's trim figure. Instantly something had happened to his heart. It had been, up to that moment, a heart that had lain singularly dormant in the presence of the opposite sex. But now it leaped up, threw off its lethargy, and prepared to go into action. It urged him to fight his way at once to this young woman's side.

Arrived in that pleasant neighborhood, he realized that his initial impression, startling and vivid as it had been, had not done the girl justice. She smiled upon him, and his heart seemed to say that this was the smile it had been waiting for. She was selling flowers, her prices were exorbitant; but the soft, lovely voice in which she named them made them sound absurdly reasonable. The somewhat unsteady Bill Hammond became her steady customer. Gladly he handed her all the money he had; and in other ways, too, it would have been evident to an onlooker that he was ready and willing to take her as his life's companion. If not, why not?

The answer was not slow in coming. Some busybody insisted on introducing them, and at the mention of her name Bill Hammond knew that this girl was, alas, not one of the orphans. True, she had at the moment only one parent—but what a parent! Jim Batchelor, president of the Batchelor Construction Company, was the sort of man who never let an obstacle stand in his way; but as an obstacle he himself had stood firmly in the way of a good many other people. And he would certainly make the stand of his life in the path of any practically penniless young man who had the audacity to court his daughter.

This bitter thought clouded the remaining moments Bill Hammond spent in the girl's company, and presently he left the charity fete, resolved never to speak to her again. But as time went on it began to appear that the afternoon had been more eventful for him than for anyone else, the

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orphans included. He had fallen in love.

Love comes to many as a blessed annoyance, and so it came to Bill Hammond. Up to that moment he had been happy and carefree; which is to say, he had been young in San Francisco. Now he had a great deal on his mind. Should he give up all thought of the girl and go his way a broken man? Or should he get busy and acquire such wealth that his own paper would speak of the subsequent marriage as the union of two great fortunes? Generally, he favored the latter course, though the means to wealth did not appear to be at hand, as anyone who has worked on a newspaper will appreciate.

Meanwhile he was accepting dinner and dance invitations of the sort he had previously eluded. If his plan was to avoid Sally Batchelor, it did not work. She was frequently among those present, and, seemingly unaware of the vast difference in their stations, she continued to smile upon him. A sort of friendship—nothing more, of course—grew up between them. She accepted his escort occasionally, had tea with him at the St. Francis. And now she had arranged for him to go on this yachting trip and meet her famous father. He was to beard the mighty lion in his palatial floating den.

He was, there in the dusk of the city room, a bit appalled at the idea. Ridiculous, of course. Why should he fear Jim Batchelor? As far as family went, he had all the better of it. His ancestors had been professional men and scholars, while Jim Batchelor's were neatly placing one brick in close juxtaposition to another. But money—ah, money. Those few bonds his father had left him, the paltry additional bunch that would be his when Aunt Ella died—chicken feed in the eyes of Batchelor, no doubt. In this cold world only cash counted.

Cynical thoughts, these; he put them aside. The spirit of adventure began to stir in his broad chest. Sally had been kind enough to arrange this party; she would find he was no quitter. He would go and meet this demon father face to face. He would discover what it was all about—the awe with which men spoke of the money king. Probably a human being, like anybody else. Yes, as Simon had suggested, he would take his other shirt.

Suddenly his thoughts took a new and more practical turn. He pictured himself arrayed for dinner on the Batchelor yacht. In what? There was, he recalled, not a single clean dress shirt in his room, and his laundry would not be returned until Saturday. As for buying new linen the dent in that

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twenty-five dollars would be serious. What to do?

He pondered. Beyond, in the cubbyhole known —secretly— among the reporters as the kennel, he saw Simon Porter frowning savagely over a rival paper's last edition. Should he ask more money from Simon? The profile was not encouraging. Then into his mind flashed the picture of a Chinese laundry on Kearny Street he had passed many times. It was, according to the sign, the establishment of Honolulu Sam, and a crudely lettered placard in the window bore this promise:

LAUNDRY LEFT BEFORE 8:00 A.M.
BACK SAME DAY

What could be fairer than that? Honolulu Sam solved the problem.

Bill Hammond rose, called a good night to the man in the cubbyhole, and was on his way. It was his plan to go somewhere for a brief and lonely dinner, then hurry to his apartment, gather up his laundry, and place it in the hands of the speedy Honolulu Sam. After which he would return home and get a good night's sleep.

But such resolutions are rarely kept in San Francisco. Men hurry to their work in the morning, promising themselves that it will be early to bed that night for them. And then, late in the afternoon, the fog comes rolling in, and vim and vigor take the place of that cold-gray-dawn sensation. As a consequence, another pleasant evening is had by all.

Bill Hammond met some friends at dinner, and when he finally returned to his apartment it was too late to disturb the Chinese from Hawaii. He made a neat bundle of his proposed laundry, set his alarm clock for six, and turned in.

"Get lots of sleep on the yacht," he promised himself.

At 7:30 the next morning, he stood at the counter of Honolulu Sam.

"Back five thirty this afternoon," Bill ordered loudly.

"Back same day. Maybe seven, maybe eight."

"Five thirty," repeated Bill Hammond firmly.

Sam stared at him with a glassy eye and slowly shook his head.

"Dollar extra for you if you do it," added Bill, and laid the currency on the counter.

Sam appropriated it. "Can do," he admitted.

"All right," said Bill. "I'll depend on you." He had meant the dollar only as an evidence of good faith, to be paid later. But no matter. A Chinese laundryman always kept his word.

He went out into what was practically the dawn, feeling confident of the future. With five clean shirts and other apparel in proportion, let them bring on

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their yacht. Easy, nonchalant, debonair, he would make himself the pride of the deep—and of Sally. Ah, Sally! At the corner of Post and Kearny the flower venders were setting out their wares. Bill took a deep breath. Life was a garden of blossoms.

When he reached the office, Simon Porter robbed the garden of its fragrance by sending him on a difficult assignment. All day he was kept hustling, with no time for lunch. It was exactly 5:30 when he grabbed his suitcase and set out for the bounding wave. Simon met him at the door and bowed low.

"Bon voyage, little brother of the rich," he said. "By the way, I've just heard you're to have a very distinguished fellow passenger."

"Of course. The Prince of Wales."

"Nobody so jolly—Henry T. Frost."

"What? Old Henry Frost?"

"Our beloved owner, our dear employer, the good master who has it in his power to sell us all down the river—and would do it without batting an eye. Here's your chance. Make the most of it, win his love and respect, and when I die of overwork, as I certainly shall inside a week, maybe he'll give you my job."

"I can't say I'm yearning to meet him," admitted Bill Hammond.

"You're talking sense. I've met him at least three hundred times, and I've always had cause to regret it. You know, something tells me you'd better stay home. You could develop whooping cough, and I could send one of the other boys."

"Nonsense!"

"Today is Friday."

"What of it?"

"Friday the thirteenth. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"Not a thing, sir. See you later."

"Well; fools rush in—" began Simon, but Bill Hammond had disappeared.

Young Mr. Hammond felt not at all foolish as he hurried down Market Street, bound first for the establishment of Honolulu Sam, and later for Pier 99. The going was slow, for the street was crowded with commuters on their way to the ferries. This little cruise, he thought, might very well prove the turning point in his life. The next few days were as bright with glittering possibilities as a decked-out Christmas tree.

He turned down Kearny Street, that thoroughfare of adventures, and at Post an adventure befell him. The traffic was held up, and he was hurrying to cross in front of a very wealthy looking automobile, when a familiar voice called, "Whoo-hoo Bill!"

He looked, and from the win-

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dow of the car he beheld protruding the head of Sally Batchelor. It was a lovely sight, but one he would gladly have dispensed with at the moment. However, he had gazed straight into her bright eyes, and to pretend not to see her was now out of the question. He circled a plebeian taxi and reached her side. She was holding open the door of the car.

"This is luck," she cried gayly. "We're on our way to the pier. Jump in."

Jump in! Without his laundry! A cold shiver ran down his spine. Luck, she called this meeting, but he was not so sure. He noted that there were three other people in the car—an elderly woman and two men. One of the latter was undoubtedly Jim Batchelor, and —yes, the other was Henry Frost. Multimillions sitting there!

"I—I'm sorry," Bill stammered. "I've got a very important errand first. I'll see you later."

"What sort of errand?" inquired Sally.

"It's—it's just around the corner—"

"Get in. We'll take you there."

He shuddered at the thought of this fifteen-thousand-dollar car, with two Japanese servants in front, pulling up before the headquarters of Honolulu Sam, laundry left before 8:00 A.M. back same day.

"Oh, no, no, really—you go along, Sally. I'll follow in a taxi."

The traffic cop had signaled for an advance and a presumptuous flivver was honking indignantly just behind Jim Batchelor's magnificence.

"Go along, Sally," urged Bill Hammond nervously. A passing car flipped his coat tail.

"We'll draw up at the curb in the next block and wait for you," she answered, smiling sweetly. Obedience wasn't in her, evidently. "Here, give me your suitcase. I'll keep it for you."

"Ah—er—no—no." He hugged it tight. "I'll keep it. I need it."

Another picture anguished him—the vision of himself rushing back to Jim Batchelor's presence with a large package all too obviously laundry. The clamor in the rear increased; the traffic cop was approaching.

"What's the idea here?" he wanted to know.

"Go along, Sally," Bill pleaded.

Now that he had the law on his side, she obeyed. Sinking back into the car, she closed the door in the policeman's face.

"Don't be long, will you?" she smiled.

The car began to move, and Bill dodged between it and the flivver, holding the precious suitcase close. Leaping for his life, he made the opposite curb, while angry chauffeurs inquired as to his sanity. He hurried on, groaning. Of all the inopportune meetings—

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A bell clanged loudly behind him as he entered the steamy precincts of Honolulu Sam. He tossed a red check on the counter, and plumping his suitcase down beside it, began to unfasten the clasps.

"Come on," he called. "A little speed here. Give me that wash."

The figure that emerged from the rear was not that of Honolulu Sam, but of a bent and aged Chinese wearing a pair of badly steamed spectacles. Sam, having business over on Grant Avenue, had left the place in charge of his uncle, down from Sacramento on a visit.

"Hurry, man, hurry!" cried Bill Hammond, waiting impatiently above his open suitcase.

But speed was not one of uncle's inborn traits. He deliberately wiped his spectacles on the tail of a handy shirt, took up the red check, and stood helplessly in front of the finished work.

"Please, please!" cried Bill. "It's done—I know it's done. I paid a dollar extra to make sure. Where's Sam? Say, listen, we're keeping all the money in San Francisco waiting. Let me help you—oh, I can't read that stuff. But please get a move on."

The old man made a gesture as of one requesting peace. He turned reproving spectacles on the customer. They were steaming up again. Once more he studied the rack, while Bill Hammond chattered wildly at his elbow. Finally the Chinese reached up and captured a fat package. Bill snatched it from him, tossed it into his suitcase, and began to close it. The Chinese was holding the two pieces of the check close to his eyes.

"One dolla," he announced.

"And very cheap too," said Bill.

He paid with a five-dollar bill, receiving in change four of those heavy silver dollars still in circulation on the coast. As he dashed out the door the bell rang again like an alarm. The old Chinese was once more applying the tail of the shirt to his spectacles.

Making admirable speed, Bill Hammond returned to Post Street and located the splendid equipage that awaited him. One of the Japanese stood ready to take his bag and open the door. A bit breathless, he climbed in and established himself on one of the little collapsible chairs, the other of which was occupied by Sally. He sat sidewise and Sally sat sidewise, and the introductions began.

"Aunt Dora, this is Mr. Hammond." Bill bowed. The large commanding woman on the rear seat, who was mainly responsible for the congestion there, bowed also—sternly. "And do you know Mr. Frost?" Sally continued. "You ought to—you work for him."

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Bill looked into the cold, fishy eyes of his employer. Henry Frost had the appearance of a deacon, though such was not by any means his reputation.

"How do you do, sir?" said Bill uncomfortably. "Mr. Frost can't possibly know all those who labor in his cause," he added.

"And Father. Father, this is Mr. Hammond."

Father held out a thin small hand. He was, indeed, a thin small man, quite unlike the accepted figure of the great financier. His face was ascetic, his eyes dreamy; there seemed, at first glance, nothing about his personality that would strike terror to an opponent. The aunt, towering like Mont Blanc at his side, was far more impressive.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Hammond," said the multimillionaire. "Sally has spoken of you."

"It's mighty kind of you, sir, to take me along like this—"

"An office assignment, I understand," put in Henry Frost in a high, unlovely voice.

"Oh, that's merely incidental," said Batchelor. "You'll find Mikklesen very interesting, Mr. Hammond. Ought to get a good story. But you're not to let work interfere with your outing, even if Henry—Mr. Frost—does happen to be with us." He smiled.

"I'll try not to, sir," Bill answered, smiling too. He felt much better. A human being, after all.

"I'm afraid my party's going to be mostly a stag affair," Jim Batchelor said, as the car swung into the broad expanse of Market Street.

"Well, we're used to that," said Sally. "Aren't we, Aunt Dora?"

"We ought to be by this time," sniffed that lady.

"There'll be Mrs. Keith, however," Batchelor went on.

"Mrs. Keith!" Henry Frost raised his bushy eyebrows.

"A very charming woman, Henry," said Jim Batchelor. "Lived in India a great deal, I believe. I want to have a talk with her about conditions over there. You see, this isn't only a pleasure cruise for me. There are two rather important questions I have to decide before I get back. There's that contract to build a bridge in India. I guess I mentioned it to you. I haven't made up my mind whether to make a bid for the job or not. Talking with Mrs. Keith and Mikklesen may decide me.

"I understand that Blake has already put in his figures," said Frost. "He'll probably underbid you."

"Very likely. But everybody knows Blake is a crook. I imagine I can get the contract away from him if I go after it. They tell me he's waiting anxiously to know what move I'll make. I'll spoil

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his game if I go in." Batchelor smiled, and it was no dreamer smiling then. "However, I've got several days. The bids don't close until next Thursday."

"And the other question, Jim?" asked Frost.

"Oh, the senatorship. I'm still thinking of entering the primaries."

"Nonsense!" growled his friend. "Why get mixed up in that sort of thing?"

"Just what I tell him," said Aunt Dora. "Still, Washington would be interesting."

"Well, I don't know," mused Batchelor. "Every man has ambitions that way, I guess. At any rate, I'm taking O'Meara, the lawyer, along on this cruise to talk over the situation. When it comes to politics he's one of the wisest."

"O'Meara!" Mr. Frost spoke sourly.

"It's a very mixed crowd, I'm sure," said Aunt Dora, and Bill Hammond felt that the glance she cast at him was a bit personal.

"A lot more interesting than a bunch of society folderols," Batchelor told her. "And when it comes to elegance, that end's taken care of too I've invited Julian Hill."

"Good news for Sally, I'm sure," remarked Aunt Dora, and again the look she gave Bill Hammond had a meaning all its own.

Bill knew that they were speaking of the third vice-president of the Batchelor concern, a young man of good family and social position whose engagement to Sally Batchelor had more than once been rumored. He glanced at the girl, but she was staring straight ahead, and her charming profile told him nothing.

The car was gliding along the Embarcadero now, that romantic threshold to the Orient. Ships that were destined for far ports waited motionless but ready, and on the piers was abundant evidence of the great business done upon the waters. Suddenly Frost spoke.

"It's a wonder to me you could get anyone to go with you today," he said.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Batchelor.

"Friday the thirteenth," explained the newspaper owner.

"The thirteenth! Say, I didn't realize that!" Batchelor's tone was serious, and glancing back, Bill Hammond was amazed at the gravity of his face.

"I didn't think you did," smiled Frost, "knowing your weakness as I do."

"What do you mean—weakness? I'm not superstitious." And Jim Batchelor smiled, as though he had just remembered something pleasant. "Besides, no bad luck can happen to us—not while I've got my luck piece in my pocket."

His luck piece? Bill Hammond looked at Sally.

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"For goodness' sake," she laughed, "don't ask him to show it to you! That calamity will befall you soon enough, and at a time when I'm elsewhere, I trust."

The car came to a halt before Pier 99, the property of a steamship company in which Jim Batchelor was a heavy stockholder. At the end of the pier, close to where a smart launch was waiting, they found the remaining four guests who had been invited on Jim Batchelor's week-end cruise.

An oddly assorted quartet, Bill Hammond thought, as Sally hastily introduced him. Mike O'Meara he already knew, having more than once sought to pry an interview out of him. A huge, bluff, ruddy man, the lawyer was decidedly out of his element and seemed to know it, but he had a gift of gab to see him through. Julian Hill proved a suave, polished man in his thirties, garbed in just the right apparel; he had no interest whatever in meeting Bill Hammond and didn't pretend any. Mrs. Keith was at that age where a woman knows that youth is going despite her gallant struggle. She had been, Bill sensed, a clinging vine in her day; but now she was a bit too plump and no doubt found the sturdy oaks elusive.

As for Mikklesen, he delighted the eye; he made the senses reel; he was magnificent. Tall, languid, with blue eyes and yellow hair, his slim figure clothed in tweeds, the Englishman added an artistic touch to any scene he chose to adorn. Save when he looked at Sally Batchelor, boredom afflicted him, and the indifference he showed in meeting Mr.—er—Hammond made the attitude of Julian Hill seem a bit too eager by comparison.

When the Japanese had got all the luggage aboard the launch, the guests followed. Bill Hammond had intended to sit beside Sally, but Mikklesen and Hill beat him to it, and he reflected that competition was going to be keen in the near future. He sank down beside Mrs. Keith. The launch sputtered and was on its way to where the seagoing yacht *Francesca* waited haughty and aloof, lording it over the more plebeian craft about her.

"Isn't this thrilling!" gushed Mrs. Keith. "You know I haven't been on a yacht for ages."

"Same here," said Bill. "Grand to be rich, don't you think?"

"It must be," sighed the woman. "I never could manage it. You must tell me all about it."

"Me?" Bill Hammond laughed. "You've got the wrong number—excuse it, please. I happen to be one of the humble poor—only a newspaper reporter."

"Oh, indeed!" Her smile faded. "How exciting—a reporter! You

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have the most wonderful experiences of course. You must tell me all about it."

"Well," said Bill Hammond cautiously, "if I'm not too busy with my work I'll be delighted."

"Work—on the yacht?"

"I'm supposed to interview Mr. Mikklesen on conditions in the Orient."

She laughed. "Oh, really? Mr. Mikklesen is an old—acquaintance of mine. I knew him in India. I'm sure he'll tell you the most interesting things—only you mustn't believe all you hear. He's a dear boy, but—imaginative. Oh, so very imaginative."

She glanced across to where Mikklesen was bending close to Sally Batchelor. The look in her eyes was not friendly.

On the deck of the *Francesca* her captain waited to greet his owner. Japanese in white coats appeared to receive the baggage.

"Dinner's at seven thirty," Jim Batchelor announced. "After the boys have shown you to your quarters I suggest that you gentlemen join me in the smoking room."

"'Stag party' is right," smiled his daughter.

"Oh, well, the ladies too, of course," amended the owner of the *Francesca*. "I thought they'd be too busy—"

As a matter of fact, he had forgotten about the ladies. It was his habit; he was a man's man.

One of the Japanese, burdened with luggage, politely requested Bill Hammond to follow, and led the way to the deck below. Mikklesen also was in the procession, and Bill wondered if they were to share the stateroom. It was not a happy prospect, for he knew the Englishman would coolly take seven-eighths of any room assigned them. They entered a passageway off which the cabins opened, and at the third door the Japanese dropped Bill's modest suitcase and, staggering under the load of the Englishman's traps, led Mikklesen inside.

"This is your cabin," Bill heard him say.

"Thank heaven," Bill thought. The Japanese emerged, took up the solitary bag, and led the way to the next door.

"So this is mine, eh?" Bill said. "Fine! Got it all to myself, I suppose."

"Yes-s," hissed the Japanese. "*Francesca* sleep fifteen guests."

"Good for the *Francesca*."

"Bath here," the servant said. He nodded toward an open door, beyond which gleamed spotless plumbing. Even as Bill looked, Mikklesen appeared in the doorway, gave him a haughty glare, then shut the door and locked it.

"Bath for two cabins," the Japanese said. "Yours too." He seemed distressed.

"Well, you'd better explain that

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to him," suggested Bill. "Otherwise I'll never see the inside of that room again."

The servant disappeared. There was the sound of voices in the next cabin. Then the lock clicked in the bathroom door and the Japanese was again in Bill's room.

"All right now," he smiled.

"Maybe," said Bill. "What's your name?"

"Tatu."

"Well, Tatu—"

He handed him a five-dollar bill. The smile broadened.

"He leave door locked, you go through his room, unlock," said Tatu.

"You got his number, Tatu. Don't worry about me, I'll bathe all right."

The servant disappeared, and Bill stood for a moment staring through the porthole at San Francisco's interesting skyline. This was the life, he reflected, sailing gayly off into the unknown. His heart sank. Had he remembered to bring his shirt studs? Feverishly he opened his suitcase—thank heaven, there they were.

He went out in search of the smoking room. On the upper deck he encountered Jim Batchelor.

"Ah, my boy, come along," said the multimillionaire. "Maybe we can scare up a cocktail."

They found Henry Frost already in the smoking room.

"When do we get to Monterey?" he wanted to know.

"Early tomorrow," said Batchelor. "There'll be plenty of time for me to trim you a round of golf before lunch."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" answered Frost. "Ten dollars a hole is my answer to that."

"Piker!" chided Batchelor. "Play golf, Hammond?"

"In a fashion," Bill said. "Not so expensively as that, however."

"Oh, it wouldn't cost you anything to take him on," Batchelor replied. "He always pays. Henry's golf's a joke to everybody but Henry himself."

O'Meara came in. "Some boat you got here, Mr. Batchelor," he said.

"Yes, it's quite a neat little craft."

"Little! It's the *Leviathan* of the west coast."

"Say, look here, O'Meara," Frost put in, "Jim here's got a crazy idea he's going to enter the senatorial primaries. Now you know the game—I'm relying on you to tell him he hasn't got a chance."

"I can't do that, and speak true," O'Meara replied. "He's got as good a chance as any of them. You put up your name, Mr. Batchelor," he added, "and leave the rest to us."

"Well, I haven't decided," Batchelor answered. "We'll talk it over later. Ah, Mr. Mikklesen, come in. Are you comfortably settled?"

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"Oh, quite," said the Englishman. "It was most frightfully good of you to invite me."

"Well, my reasons weren't wholly unselfish," Batchelor admitted. "I've sort of lost track of things in India lately—thought you could set me straight."

"Any information I have, my dear sir, is yours. I believe you're thinking of that bridge contract."

"I am—seriously."

Mikklesen nodded. "Of course, it's a bit risky," he said. "The government isn't any too stable, to put it mildly. There are other difficulties— I'll speak of them later. Yes, decidedly risky."

"You bet it is," remarked Julian Hill, who had just come in.

"But I like risks," smiled Batchelor.

"I know, Governor, but this is the limit." Mr. Hill seemed very much in earnest. "I'm strongly opposed."

"You were opposed to that lighthouse job in South America too," Batchelor reminded him.

"I happened to be wrong that time. But something tells me I'm not wrong now. Let's keep out. Don't you say so, Mr Mikklesen?"

"I will say this"—the Englishman studied the end of his cigarette—"if you do go in, it will be a matter of what you call the breaks. They may be for you; they may be against you. You'll need all the luck in the world."

"Ah, luck," smiled Batchelor. "That's where the Batchelor Construction Company shines. For more than thirty-five years the breaks have been our way. And I've still got my luck piece." He took from his waistcoat a silver dollar.

Frost and Hill smiled at each other and turned away, but the other men regarded the coin with interest.

"Gentlemen," said Jim Batchelor softly, "there it is. The first dollar I ever earned. I was a kid of eleven at the time. My father was a mason and he was working on an apartment building they were putting up on Russian Hill. He heard they wanted a water boy and he got me the job. I had to fetch the water from a well that was a block away—a block down the hill. I carried an empty pail the easy route, but coming back it was filled, and I puffed and sweat and staggered up the grade. It was my first lesson in how hard money comes.

"On the first Saturday night I got my pay—this dollar—and I walked home with my father past shop windows that were one long temptation. 'What you going to spend it for, Jim?' my father asked. 'I'm not going to spend it,' I told him. 'I'm going to keep it—always.' And I have. For thirty-seven years it's been my luck piece and it's made good on the job. I've felt it in my pocket at

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the big moments of my life, and it's given me confidence and courage. A little silver dollar coined in 1884."

He appeared to be holding it out to Mikklesen, and the Englishman reached out his hand to take it. But Jim Batchelor restored it to his pocket.

"And it's still working for me, gentlemen," he added.

"Poppycock," said Henry Frost.

"Maybe," smiled Batchelor. "But I hear there is a standing offer of one thousand dollars in the office of Blake and Company for that little luck piece. Poppycock, eh?"

"Oh, well, Blake knows what a fool you are," said Frost. "They realize the psychological effect on your mind if you lost that thing, so they're willing to pay for it."

"They'll never get the chance," answered Batchelor, and his eyes flashed. "I think I will go into that India thing. In fact, I know I will. Gentlemen, here are the cocktails."

They stood around a table, each with a glass in his hand. As Bill Hammond looked about him, he saw that the eyes of each man present were on the pocket that held the little silver dollar. Mikklesen lifted his glass.

"Here's to your good luck, sir," he said. "May it continue."

"Thank you," answered Jim Batchelor, and they drank.

At seven o'clock Bill Hammond set out for his stateroom to dress for dinner. At the top of the main companionway he met Sally—Sally in a breath-taking gown and looking her loveliest.

"Hurry up," she said. "I'm eager for someone to help me enjoy the sunset."

"Keep the place open," he begged. I'm really the best man for the job. Sally, I know who it is I have to thank for this little outing. You're always doing something for the orphans, aren't you?"

"Were you glad to come?"

"Glad? What weak words you use!"

"I thought you would be. The yacht's a lot of fun really."

"It's not the yacht I'm thinking of. If you'd invited me out in a rowboat my joy would have been the same. You know—"

Henry Frost and Hill came up behind them.

"Dear me," said Sally, "what a long cocktail hour! I'm afraid Dad's been telling you the story of the dollar."

"He did mention it," said Hill.

"And I'm glad he did," Bill Hammond said. "It made him seem mighty human to me. The picture of him struggling up Russian Hill with that water pail—"

"Dear Dad!" Sally smiled. "There is something rather ap-

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pealing about the story. The first time you hear it, I mean. But when you've had it pop up constantly for twenty years, as I have, you're bound to get a little fed up on it. I've been very wicked. There've been times when I wished to heaven he'd lose that dollar."

"Here too," said Julian Hill. "Particularly when it leads Mr. Batchelor into some wild adventure like this India bridge contract."

"Lose it!" cried Henry Frost. His little eyes glittered. "Why, it would ruin him!"

"Yes, I rather think it would," said Hill; and it wasn't so much what he said, Bill Hammond reflected as he hurried off to his cabin. It was the way he said it.

Mikklesen had left the smoking room sometime before, and as Bill Hammond passed the door of the Englishmen's cabin he was glad to hear a voice lifted in song inside. But when he reached his own room and tried to enter the bath, he found himself locked out. As he savagely rattled the knob he was happy to recall that George Washington won his war. Confound this Mikklesen—had he no consideration for anybody?

The answer was that he hadn't; one look at him told that.

As Bill turned angrily back into his room, Tatu entered from the passageway.

"Very late, very busy," said Tatu. "Now I lay you out." And lifted a dinner coat from Bill's suitcase.

"Never mind, I'll attend to that," Bill told him. "You go in and lay that Englishman out. Lay him out cold, and then unlock the bath for me."

Tatu hastened away, and again there was the sound of voices in the next cabin. The lock in the door leading to the bath clicked and Tatu emerged. Bill dashed by him and turned the key in Mikklesen's door.

"You run along, Tatu," he said. "I'm in too much of a hurry to learn how to be valeted tonight. Sometime when we're both free you can give me a lesson."

"You want me, ring bell," suggested Tatu, going.

Bill was hastily peeling off his clothes. If he was to have a few moments alone with Sally and the sunset, speed was the watchword. But he had been known to rise in the morning, bathe, shave, dress, and reach the office in less than twenty minutes, and he was out now to smash the record.

As he was putting the finishing touches on an elaborate shave, Mikklesen began to rattle the door knob. He rattled long and earnestly, and it was music to the reporter's ears.

"Oh, I say, old chap, you're not annoyed, are you?" Bill mur-

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mured. "Not really? How beastly!"

"Damn!" said a voice, and the clatter ceased.

Bill hurried from the bathroom, leaving the lock *in statu quo*. By way of preparation he laid out his diamond shirt studs—rich-looking, if old-fashioned—the property of poor Uncle George, handed to Bill by Aunt Ella the day after the funeral.

Humming happily to himself, he lifted the fat package of laundry into the open. Good Honolulu Sam, he had certainly come across as promised. That back-same-day promise was on the level. Must have hurried some. Great people, the Chinese; you could bank on them. If they said they'd do a thing, they did it. He snapped the string with his fingers and gently laid back the wrapping paper. A bright pink shirt stared up at him.

It is astonishing sometimes, in the crises of our lives, how slow we can be in comprehending. Bill's first reaction was to wonder how this sartorial atrocity had got in with his things. He tossed it aside and was confronted by the purplest shirt he had ever met. Next in line of march came a greeen shirt that would have made excellent adornment on St. Patrick's Day. Then some rather shabby underwear and eloquent socks. A few collars. But no more shirts!

Bill Hammond sat down weakly.

"Good lord," he cried. "It's not my laundry!"

And if comprehension had been slow in coming, it came now with a rush. Alone, all alone on a restless ocean, and without a dress shirt to his name. Dinner in fifteen minutes. At least two rivals for Sally's favor present, and each an elegant dresser.

And this was the cruise on which he had hoped to make a dashing impression, to win Sally's family, to say nothing of the girl herself, by his charm. How did one do that without a dress shirt?

Anger overcame him. Nor did he have any trouble locating the object of his wrath. That half blind old Chinese with the steaming spectacles—there was the guilty party.

The old idiot! In one careless moment he had destroyed the priceless reputation of his race for accuracy, built up laboriously through many years of giving back the right shirt to the right customer—destroyed it utterly, doomed his race to extinction. For Bill Hammond would attend to that personally, and he would begin in the establishment of Honolulu Sam.

But time was passing; he mustn't waste any more of it planning the massacre of an aged Chinese. The problem was here and now. What to do? The

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weather was calm enough, but the *Francesca* was tossing about a bit. He might retire to his berth and plead sickness. And leave Sally to the company of Mikklesen and Julian Hill? Not likely! No, he must have a shirt—robbery—a killing or two, maybe—but he must have a shirt.

Was there anyone aboard who would help him? O'Meara, perhaps; but no, O'Meara's shirt would go round him at least twice. As for the other men, there was not one to whom he would consider revealing his plight. Sally—if he could bring himself to tell her—would be sympathetic, but Sally had no dress shirts to distribute. That left—hold on—that left Tatu. Thank heaven he had given Tatu five dollars.

He rang the bell and almost immediately Tatu appeared. Frankness, it seemed to Bill, was the only course.

"Terrible thing's happened, Tatu," he said. "See"—he indicated the frightful pink shirt—"Chinese laundry returned the wrong wash. I haven't any dress shirt."

"Chinese not reliable people," commented Tatu.

"You said it. Sometime you and I'll have a long talk about that. But now, Tatu, now—dinner coming on. What to do?" An idea flashed into his mind. "You haven't an extra shirt, have you?" he inquired hopefully.

Tatu opened his coat and revealed a fine white bosom—but no shirt went with it.

"Have extra bosom," he said. "Maybe you like—"

"No, no, I couldn't take a chance. Must have an entire shirt. There's five more dollars waiting for you if you can dig one up."

Tatu considered. "Maybe," he said. "I find out."

He went on his momentous errand. Bill, left alone, put on his shoes. Slowly but surely the structure was approaching completion. But the shirt! Would that necessary, that vital bit of facade come to hand? Or must he sit shirtless in his cabin while the gay diners made merry round the festive board?

Something in Tatu's eye made Bill feel that this was a moment for caution. He turned off his light and opened the door leading into the dim passageway. No one in sight. Where was Tatu anyhow? The door of the cabin at the end of the corridor began to open slowly, and a man emerged. He looked warily about him, and then, walking on tiptoe, started down the passageway. Tatu? No, it wasn't Tatu. Bill Hammond, peering from the darkness as the man passed his stateroom, saw clearly who it was. He watched him open the door of a stateroom farther down and disappear.

Nervously Bill sat down on his berth. Would Tatu never come?

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Why, he'd had time enough to scare up a whole outfit—then Tatu appeared in the doorway. Bill leaped up, closed the door behind him, and snapped on the light.

Rapture! There was a gleaming dress shirt in Tatu's hand. Like a drowning man going after the well-known straw, Bill pounced on it.

Tatu hung on to it. "Maybe too big," he said. "I put in studs."

He took up one of Uncle George's diamonds and began to struggle with the shirt. "Very stiff bosom," he announced. "Oh, very stiff."

"What size is it?" demanded Bill, feverishly investigating the collars bequeathed him by the owner of the pink shirt. He had a vision of sending out again for a collar.

"Doesn't tell size," whispered Tatu. "No name of maker, also. That very good."

Bill experienced a momentary qualm.

"Where'd you get this shirt, Tatu?" he demanded sternly.

"I get him," replied Tatu. "Here, try on."

"A little large," said Bill. "But it's a shirt. And say, look—this collar fits. Luck, Tatu, luck. Wow, the bosom is stiff! Got to be proud and unbending tonight." He was silent, working on his tie.

"Everything fine," Tatu hinted.

"Oh, yes, the five dollars. Here you are. Say, listen, Tatu, I'm not sure that we ought to have—er—borrowed this. We'll have to return it."

"I return it," Tatu agreed.

"That's right; of course we'll give it back, along with a dollar to cover depreciation and washing. Honesty, Tatu—the best policy."

"Yes-s, thank you."

"Always be honest and you'll fear no man." The Japanese was at the door. "Say, Tatu, I really ought to know where you got it."

"I got him," smiled Tatu, and went out.

Well, a desperate situation required a desperate remedy. Bill got into his trousers and was slipping on his coat when the first notes of *The Roast Beef of Old England,* played falteringly on a bugle by a pantry boy with ambitions, floated down to him. Miklesen was once more rattling at the bathroom door, and after extinguishing all the lights, Bill noiselessly unlocked it, then hurried upstairs to find Sally. Her eyes reproached him.

"The sun went down," she said, "and you never came up."

"I know," he answered; "forgive me." He straightened his collar nervously. "I was detained."

"That's not much of an explanation," she told him.

"Thank you," he said absently. He was thinking that the owner

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of the pink shirt certainly needed some new collars. This one had a razor edge and seemed to have been recently honed.

"You're perfectly welcome," smiled Sally, "whatever it is you're thanking me for. Pardon me for mentioning it, but are you in your right mind?"

"Of course not," he said. "I knew you were lovely, but somehow tonight—well, as the fellow said, my senses reel."

Sally rose. "We'd better have the next reel in the dining room," she suggested. "Dad hates people to be late."

Bill found he was to sit on Sally's right, and the discovery cheered him, particularly as Henry Frost was on the other side of her—an arrangement that couldn't be improved upon. His spirits rose rapidly. Minutes before plunged in despair, he had emerged triumphant and all was right with the world. What a lot of difference somebody's else's shirt could make!

During the first course Jim Batchelor suggested that Miklesen tell something of his experiences in the Orient, and from that point the dinner was a monologue. But like most Englishmen of his class, Miklesen was a charming talker and well worth listening to. He spoke of his adventures as subeditor of an English newspaper in Shanghai, of the time he had typhoid in the General Hospital in Yokohama, of the fight he got into one gory night at the old Danish hotel where the beachcombers hold forth in that lovely port. He took his hearers into the interior of China on a scientific expedition, thrilled them with a holdup by bandits, and brought them back in time for an audience with an ambassador in Peking. Life as he had known it had been glamorous.

It was not until the coffee that he appeared to run down and the conversation became general. Suddenly there was one of those inexplicable lulls in the gentle buzz of talk, and the voice of Jim Batchelor rang out in conversation with Mrs. Keith at his right.

"And I have kept it—all these years. In the big moments of my life I've felt it in my pocket and it has given me courage to go on. A little silver dollar coined in the year—"

"Oh, dear," Sally laughed, "he's telling her about his luck piece."

"Thrilling!" Mrs. Keith said. She smiled encouragingly on the multimillionaire. "You've got it with you still?"

"I certainly have." He removed something from his pocket. "My luck piece." He stared at it, his face paled slightly. "This—is not—my dollar," he said slowly.

A tense silence fell.

Sally finally spoke: "Not your

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dollar, Dad? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. This is a dollar coined in 1903." He threw it down on the table and began to search his pockets. Again the silence. His search was evidently fruitless. "I—I'm very sorry this has happened," said Batchelor. "It may seem rather trivial to you, but to me it's almighty important. If—if it's a joke of some sort, I—I don't appreciate it. However, I'll overlook it if the joker will own up at once. In heaven's name"—his voice trembled— "is it a joke?"

He looked eagerly into each face around the table. No one spoke. Batchelor's eyes hardened.

"Then there's some more sinister motive back of it," he said.

"Nonsense, Jim!" said Aunt Dora. "You're making a mountain out of nothing."

"I'm the judge of that;" Batchelor said, and his voice was like chilled steel. "However" with an effort he managed to smile— "you're right, in a way. I mustn't spoil the party."

The tension lessened, and Mrs. Keith took that moment to show sympathy.

"What a pity!" she said: "Perhaps one of your crew—"

"No, Mrs. Keith," Jim Batchelor said; "my crew has been with me for years. The servants—I'm not so sure. They will all be examined before leaving the yacht. And before we drop the subject, has anyone else missed anything?"

Bill Hammond's heart stood still. The shirt! Somebody would speak up regarding the mysterious disappearance of a shirt, and where would that lead? Little beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. But no one said anything. Evidently the owner of the shirt was still ignorant of his loss. Bill breathed again.

"Well, that's that," said Batchelor. "We'll let the matter drop."

"One minute!" O'Meara was on his feet. "Before we do that I've got a suggestion to make. Mr. Batchelor here has lost something of value, and until it's found we're all under a cloud. I for one want to be searched, and I guess every honest man here feels the same way."

"Nonsense!" Batchelor cried. "I won't hear of it!"

"But Mr. O'Meara is right," said Mikklesen. "I recall a dinner at the British Embassy in Delhi two years ago, when the hostess lost a diamond necklace. It was a most distinguished party, but we were taken one by one into an anteroom and gone over with amazing thoroughness." He, too, stood up. "I also insist," he said.

"Rot! I wouldn't insult my guests," Batchelor was still protesting.

"You'll have nothing to do with

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it, Governor," Julian Hill told him. "We're going through with this for our own satisfaction. If the ladies will wait in the lounge—"

Reluctantly Aunt Dora, Mrs. Keith, and Sally left. O'Meara promptly removed his coat.

"Now one of you go over me." he said, "and I'll do the job for the rest of you."

Julian Hill stepped forward to oblige. With a none too easy conscience Bill Hammond also removed his coat. That shirt was not a successful fit—suppose someone recognized it. O'Meara, having been pronounced innocent, went at his work with enthusiasm. But the search had no results. Through it Jim Batchelor sat staring at the table as though the matter held no interest for him. O'Meara finished empty-handed.

"Well, if you boys have done with your nonsense," remarked Batchelor, "we'll join the ladies. And as a favor to me we won't speak of this again—tonight."

Aunt Dora was superintending the placing of two tables for bridge in the main lounge. It appeared there were just the right number—with one left over. After she had disposed of the usual impassioned pleas from those desiring to be the one left out, Julian Hill was elected to that position, and shortly disappeared from the room. They cut for partners, and to his horror Bill found himself seated opposite Aunt Dora. She had the air of being the person who had invented bridge, and so she had, practically.

Bill dealt. Majestically Aunt Dora took up her hand and glanced through it.

"Count your cards," she ordered. "That's the first rule. What rules do you play, Mr. Hammond?"

"Rules?" repeated Bill wanly. "I don't know. I just play."

"We'll pivot," said Aunt Dora promptly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Bill meekly.

"I mean to say, we'll change partners frequently."

"Oh," said Bill heartily, "I'm for it."

The glare she turned on him moved him to look the other way, and his eyes met those of the man he had seen creeping along the corridor just before dinner. He became suddenly thoughtful, so that Aunt Dora's voice suggesting that he bid seemed miles away. However, it came rapidly nearer.

As the play progressed, Aunt Dora found that she alone seemed to be giving the matter her best thought. She was a woman of superb endurance, but after a distressing rubber with O'Meara as partner, she called it an evening and rang the gong. The ship's clock had recently struck six bells, and after a careful calculation and

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a look at his watch, Bill Hammond knew that it was now just after eleven.

Mikklesen and Julian Hill both seemed determined on a bedtime chat with Sally, but after a meaning look at Bill Hammond the girl dissuaded them.

"Wait till I get a wrap," she whispered to Bill. "I want to tell you about that sunset."

When she returned she led the way to a couple of chairs that stood close together in a secluded spot on the afterdeck.

"Wonderful night," Bill murmured. The Pacific was calm, the water was liquid silver in the moonlight, the breeze was not too chill. A great night to be young, and they both were.

"Glad you like it," said Sally. "It's just what I ordered."

They sat silent for a moment.

"How was the sunset anyhow?" Bill inquired.

"Not bad at all," said Sally, "for the sun. I think I prefer the moon myself." A long, long silence. "Bill, say something," the girl protested at length. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm just wishing. I'm wishing your name was Sally Jones and your father was principal of a high school—and paid accordingly. It's what I've been wishing ever since that day at the charity bazaar."

She laughed. "Dad never wasted any time on high schools," she said. "Still, it does no harm to wish."

A cooler breeze arrived from the Pacific. Bill rose, took up a rug from a nearby chair, and tucked it about her. His hand touched hers, and contrary to his intention he seized and held it.

"Sally!" he said ecstatically.

"Bill!" she answered.

He gave up the idea and sat down. Another silence.

"How—how do you like my father?" she asked presently.

"Oh, he's all right. But it doesn't matter what I think of him. He'd be just as interested to get the opinion of one of those goldfish in the lounge."

"Well, I don't know," said Sally. "Dad's pretty human. You must remember, he hasn't always traveled on yachts. At one time he was a stonemason, earning a hundred a month."

"How long ago was that?"

"About the time he was—married."

The way she said it, somehow; the night, the moon, the bracing effect of ocean air—whatever the cause—

"Sally," Bill heard himself saying, "I'm in love. With you, I mean. But I guess that isn't news, is it?"

"Not precisely," she answered slowly. "However, I'm glad you said it. We couldn't have got anywhere if you hadn't."

"Sally!" The moon was under

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a cloud. It was just as well.

"It's no use, Sally," said Bill, coming to. "Your father would never hear of it."

"He'd be bound to."

"You know what I mean. He'd have me—boiled in oil."

"He'd have to boil me too."

"Sally, you're wonderful! Will you—will you take a chance with me?"

"I don't like the way you put it. I'll marry you, if that's what you mean."

"On our own—that's what I'm getting at. I've seen so many men marry rich girls and become lap dogs. I wouldn't take a cent from your father—nor a job either."

"Don't worry, you wouldn't get either."

"Sally, I never intended to tell you this. I was just going to eat my heart out in silence, like the strong, silent man that I am."

"Well, that would have been romantic. But I think I like it better this way. My role is a bit more active."

"Darling! What do you think I'd better do? Should I speak to your father the next time I see him?"

"Of course. Say good night or good morning, as the case may be, and that's all."

"Well, I suppose he would hit the ceiling."

"He wouldn't stamp round and forbid it, if that's what you think. It's not his way—he's too subtle. He'd just quietly queer it; nobody would ever be sure how it was done either. He's fathoms down, Dad is."

"Certainly sounds too deep for a frank, wholesome lad like me."

"I think we'd better—just drift along," Sally said. "Give him a chance to take a liking to you."

"You believe in long engagements, then?"

"Nonsense! I'm fond of you. And Father and I are much alike." She pondered. "If you could only make a hit with him somehow. I'd never be quite happy about marrying anybody—not even you — if he was opposed. He's really wild about me."

"Naturally."

"Poor Dad. He's broken-hearted. That silly little dollar meant so much to him."

It was Bill's turn to ponder.

"You know, Sally," he said, "I've done considerable police reporting, and on more than one occasion a hard-boiled detective has complimented me. I've dug up some rather important evidence."

"Oh, Bill, that's an idea!"

"If I found that dollar for him, do you think he'd give me you as a reward?"

"He wouldn't stop there. He'd throw in Aunt Dora and the yacht."

"You give me pause. I mean—I couldn't afford the yacht."

"Bill!" Her eyes were shining.

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"Let's work on the case together. What's the first move? We talk over the suspects, don't we?"

"That might be a good idea. We'll start with you. You said yourself there were times when you hoped he'd lose it."

"Yes, I know. I'm sorry I said it now. Do be serious, Bill. Aunt Dora—she wouldn't take it."

"But you can't e l i m i n a t e anybody that way."

"Yes, you can. A woman's intuition. Mr. Mikklesen—no motive. Mr. O'Meara?"

"He's a politician. Their ways are deep and dark."

"I feel that; and he was so insistent on being searched. That's always suspicious."

"I thought it was rather fine of your father—his courtesy to his guests. He was against the search."

Sally laughed. "Don't be fooled by Dad's courtesy," she warned. "He knew darn well nobody would be fool enough to steal his dollar and then walk in to dinner with the thing in his pocket. Dad's the soul of hospitality and all that, but he wants that dollar back, and before he gives up he'll put all his guests through the third degree, if necessary. Let's see, there's Julian Hill. He seems awfully keen to keep Dad out of that India job."

"Yes, Hill's a possibility. And how about Mrs. Keith? Know anything about her?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, she's poor," said Bill. "She told me so. But then, so am I. By the way, don't let's overlook me."

"Nonsense! You wouldn't take anything that didn't belong to you."

"You think not?" Certainly a stiff bosom on that shirt.

"Oh, Bill, it's all so hopeless," she sighed. "If we only had a shred of evidence to go on!"

"Maybe we have."

"Bill—not really?"

"You've forgotten one guest. What motive would Henry Frost have in stealing that dollar?"

"None whatever, so far as I know."

"That's the way I feel," Bill went on. "Yet as I understand it, your father's cabin is the one at the end of the corridor off which our rooms open." She nodded. "And just before dinner I certainly saw Henry Frost come out of that room, acting very strangely. He tiptoed along the corridor and slipped into his own room very unostentatiously."

"Bill! It seems ridiculous!"

"I know it does. My saintly employer! He'll be awfully pleased with me if I can fasten this thing on him."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. It's a delicate situation. If I go to your father with my story, Frost will probably have some simple explanation that

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will make me look like a fool. It seems to me it wouldn't be a bad scheme if I put the matter up to Frost and let him explain to me—if he can."

"Goodbye job."

"Probably; but in the interests of justice—and there are other newspapers."

"Well, if you really think it's the best plan—"

"Maybe not, but I'm going to try it. I can't treat old Frost as a criminal, and shadow him. I don't really think he took the dollar anyhow. But I should like to know what he was doing in your father's room. I'd better see if I can find him."

"How thrilling!" Sally said. "We're in this together, remember. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Do you think I'll do for Watson?"

"No, you're altogether too intelligent," Bill told her.

"Oh, Bill, do you think I've got brains? I love brains."

"And I love you. You—you really meant all that—about marrying me? It doesn't seem possible."

"It's more than that; it's probable. Good night—and good luck."

"This is my lucky night," he told her. And it was, for she was in his arms.

His luck held even after he left her, for he found Henry Frost sitting alone over a highball in the smoking room. His employer evinced no joy at seeing him, but Bill casually lighted a cigar and seated himself.

"Unusually smooth passage," he remarked.

"Smooth enough," said Mr. Frost.

"Awfully jolly cruise, it seems to me. Nothing to mar it—except, of course, the disappearance of that dollar. Too bad about that."

"A great pity."

The old man drained his glass and seemed about to rise.

"Just a moment, Mr. Frost," Bill said. "You're an older man than I am, and I'd like to ask your advice."

"Yes?"

"If any one of us has any evidence that might prove useful in tracing the—er—thief, it should be passed on to our host. Don't you agree?"

"No question about it."

"I'm in a rather difficult position, sir. I happened to be standing at my door just before dinner—the light was off at my back—and I saw a man come out of Mr. Batchelor's cabin and go down the corridor to his own. His actions were rather peculiar."

"Really?"

"Now what would you do in my position, sir?"

"I'd certainly tell Jim Batchelor all about it."

"But, Mr. Frost—you were the man."

Business rivals sometimes

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referred to Mr. Frost's countenance as the great stone face. Not without reason, thought Bill as his employer sat grimly regarding him.

"How much," said Frost, "do they pay you at the office?"

"This is not a case of blackmail, sir," he said.

The old man's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Who said anything about blackmail? I was just going to add that whatever you get you're overpaid, for you're the stupidest whippersnapper I've ever met. Why should I take Jim Batchelor's dollar?"

"I don't know, sir."

"No, nor does anybody else. I did go to his room, and I did filch something from him; but it was nothing of importance. I'll explain it to you, though I don't know that I'm under any necessity to do so. For years Jim and I have had an argument about valets. He claims I need one, and I claim I'm still competent to dress myself. When I opened my bag tonight I discovered that I had foolishly come aboard without any collars."

"No collars?" repeated Bill. Then multimillionaires had their troubles too.

"Precisely. I wasn't going to tell him—I never would have heard the last of it. I knew we wore the same size, so when he was in his bath I slipped in and took one of his collars. That explains what you saw, and you're at liberty to go to him with your story any time you like."

"You sound fishy, old boy," Bill thought. But then, so would his tale about the shirt. "I'm not going to say anything to Mr. Batchelor," he announced. "Not for the present, at least."

"Just as you please." Frost stood up. "I'll bid you good night."

"One moment, sir. Should I go on with that interview with Mikklesen? I mean—am I still working for you?"

For a long moment they stared into each other's eyes. It was the employer who first looked away.

"Ah, yes, the Mikklesen story. Go on with it by all means."

Bill smiled knowingly as he watched Henry Frost leave the room.

"Who said anything about blackmail?" he murmured.

The decks of the *Francesca* were deserted as Bill hurried to his stateroom. The berth looked good. Hastily he removed his coat, his collar, and then the ill-fitting shirt. Glad to get that off. Still, it had been better than none. He laid it down on the narrow settee and Uncle George's studs seemed to flash up at him reprovingly. A Hammond in a borrowed shirt!

"Get Tatu to return it in the morning," he thought. "I can buy another in Monterey."

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Once in the berth he lay for a time reflecting on the great event of the evening. Sally loved him. It had seemed a dream too remote to consider, yet here it was, coming true. Life was certainly kind to him—all this happiness—obstacles in the way, of course—

Ho-Hum. Must find that dollar. Who had it? Funny about old Frost. Explanation didn't sound right somehow. Yet it might be true. How about the others—Hill, O'Meara, Mrs. Keith? So many possibilities. Confusing—sure was confusing — possibilities — He slept.

He awoke with a start. It was still dark; he could see nothing; but he knew instinctively there was someone in the room.

"Whoosh there?" he muttered, still half asleep.

A noise—the opening of a door. Bill leaped from the berth, snapped on the light, and looked out into the corridor. At the far end of that dim passage he saw a dark figure mounting, two at a time, the stairs to the upper deck. He grabbed his dressing gown, shiffled into his slippers, and followed.

His pause to get into slippers was fatal to the pursuit, for when he reached the deck he appeared to be alone in the world. He was fully awake now, but completely at a loss as to his course. He walked along the rail, uncertainly, toward the stern of the boat. Suddenly he stopped.

The sight that arrested him was not on the yacht, but on the calm surface of the moonlit waters. There, floating rapidly away from the *Francesca* on the wet Pacific, was a white shirt—a dress shirt. The thing was unbelievable, yet there it was; and—did he imagine it?—were not those Uncle George's precious diamond studs sparkling in the bosom that lay on the broader bosom of a very large ocean?

Farther and farther away drifted the shirt with Uncle George's legacy aboard, and, fascinated, Bill moved along the rail, his eyes glued on it in fond farewell. A voice spoke suddenly and his heart stood still.

"Hello! Out for a stroll?"

He turned. A dark figure was sitting in the lee of the dining room, and the red light of a cigar burned steadily.

"That you, O'Meara?" Bill asked.

"Sure is. Lovely night, ain't it?"

"Have you been here long?"

"About an hour and a half. Seemed a pity to turn in a night like—"

"Never mind the night. Who was it ran up here just before I did?"

"Who was what?"

"Somebody was in my cabin—I followed him up here."

"Say, kid, you'd better take

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something for your nerves. You're the first human being I've seen for an hour and a half."

"Been here all that time, eh?" said Bill. "Yet that cigar's just been lighted."

"It happens to be my third," said O'Meara. "And if I was you, I wouldn't try the detective business. It ain't for kids. There's something doing on this boat—we all know that. But I'm not in on it. I'm just on a little cruise for my health—see? Just out to get a little peace and quiet after a busy week in the city. And that's what I was gettin' until you dashed up like a wild man and made a nasty crack about my cigar."

"Oh, no offense," said Bill "Only—"

"Only what?"

"I suppose you were so taken with the peace and quiet you missed that other fellow completely."

"You go back to bed and rest them nerves."

"That's what I'm going to do," Bill answered, and left hastily.

He was, indeed, in a great hurry to return. He dashed into his stateroom and looked anxiously about. It was as he feared—the shirt was gone! And Uncle George's studs! What would Aunt Ella say?

He sat down on the edge of his berth, trying to grasp this odd turn of events. Somebody had taken a violent dislike to his having that shirt. Who? The owner probably. That was it, the owner had recognized his property at the time of the search, and now—But who was the owner? Well, he could find that out in the morning from Tatu.

He yawned. It was all very confusing. Why should this mysterious stranger come to claim his property in the silent night? Why, having regained it, should he toss it on the chill Pacific's bosom? Had all this any connection with Jim Batchelor's dollar?

Questions—questions. All very confusing. One thing was certain—O'Meara had been lying. Bill yawned again; his berth looked warm and inviting. He rose, turned out the light, left dressing gown and slippers in the middle of the floor, and was soon deep in slumber . . .

(Continued on page 98)

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a *NEW* "thriller" by

GERALD KERSH

first publication in the United States

Poindexter, the famous hangman, inventor of the Poindexter Drop, was now at the end of his career. Eavesdrop on the old executioner talking to his protégé, the young man whom Poindexter had trained to carry on after him . . .

ONE CASE IN A MILLION

by GERALD KERSH

POINDEXTER, THE OLD EXECUTIONER, who taught me my trade, sent for me before he died. His mind was never far from his work, so we talked shop.

I sat by Poindexter's bed. "How are you feeling, Mr. Poindexter?" I asked, because he did not look at all well. "Anything you fancy? What do you say to a bit of brandy?" I drew a bottle from one of my pockets.

But old Poindexter shook his head, saying, "I promised my dear old mother I'd never drink spirits, and I'm not going to break that pledge now. Anyway, it always disagreed with me; and, you mark my words, drink leads to no good. You ought to know that yourself without me telling you.

"Why, a good four out of every ten clients wouldn't have come our way, Balsam, if it hadn't been for their drinking spirits. A glass of beer, as my dear old mother always used to say, never did anybody much harm . . . No, thanks, Balsam; not even a bottle of stout—it might upset my stomach. I'll drink an egg beaten up in warm milk, with a little sugar in it. You can have some brandy, if you like—though, mind you, I advise against it.

"I've always advised against it, 'specially before a job—any job, let alone a world-famous one, like you've got to do, Balsam, my boy."

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I said, "I know, Mr. Poindexter. You've been like a father to me, always."

Old Poindexter said, "Well, as one might say, I always regarded you as, sort of, a son. I learned you your craft, didn't I? They may say what they like about me, but I'll go down in history as the First Scientific Executioner.

"You know that. The others—well, they just hanged a man; me, I *executed* him. Why, it must have been about the time of the Barton Place Murder when I perfected what they now call Poindexter's Drop. Remember? It was in 1897—"

"I was an apprentice, then," I said, "and the Poindexter Drop was a little before my time, Mr. Poindexter; but I remember, all right. It was you who trained me—I ought to know, Mr. Poindexter, oughtn't I?"

He talked to me, half pleading yet with a certain severity—somewhat as an anxious teacher talks to a nervous pupil on the eve of some Examination, as if fearing to be let down and therefore offering encouragement mixed with admonition.

Poindexter said, "You've got to understand this one case in a million. And I won't be able to see the operation through. That's what the newspapers call 'An Irony of Fate' . . . You're a lucky boy, young Balsam, a lucky boy!"

Then I said, "I hate the job, to tell you the truth. I had half a mind to report sick, and let somebody else do it."

Poindexter sat up, and his voice was urgent as he cried, "No! That would be slacking, and you must never do that! No malingering, Balsam, or I'll—"

Then plaintively he asked, "Who would take your place? Bill Vince? Bill Vince is a nervous boy. Twice he fumbled the straps. Once, when he was pulling the hood over the head of Littlecrown, who did the Sheffield Hatchet Murder, he scratched Littlecrown's lip with his thumbnail. Littlecrown let out a yell, and turned half sideways as I pulled the bolt.

"And that was the only job I ever bungled; and it was all Vince's fault . . . No, Balsam, if it's with my last breath that I say it: I look to you to keep my reputation clean."

"Mr. Poindexter, I promise I won't let you down," I said. "Only I wish you could be behind me!"

Poindexter said, "Enough of that, my boy. I felt pretty much as you do, now, when I executed Mrs. Nardwick for murdering her husband fifteen years ago. I had nerves then, upon my word! Between hanging a woman and hanging a man, there's a certain difference, you understand. I hope you never have to hang a woman!

"Let's not go into details, son,

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but Mrs. Nardwick was on my mind for quite a little while after that. The fact is, you know, I've got a soft heart. I always think of my dear old mother, you understand . . . I never could bear to hurt a woman, Balsam!"

"It said in the Record '*Death Inst.*,' didn't it?" I said.

"Very likely," said Poindexter, "very likely. I always put Death down as *Inst.* Very likely it is *inst.* Instantaneous, *inst* . . . I never could bring myself to hurt anybody, you know—that's why I worked out the Poindexter Drop, and tried to arrange matters so that everything would be over in a second—head covered, arms tied, legs tied, rope adjusted — simultaneous! — and, *click*!"

"The way I work it out, Mr. Poindexter, it can't hurt," I said.

"No, no," said Poindexter eagerly, "not half so much as a toothache. As I conceive it, it must feel like a quick blow under the ear. You simply see stars, and then comes the dark. Later you wake up. Ah, but where? And it's *after* you wake up that the pain comes on, isn't it?"

"Ah, yes, but—"

"No, but wait a minute! I had a dream the other night—last night, to be exact—a dream of falling. I was going up and up and up a ladder—and all of a sudden I stepped on a rung that wasn't there and fell a thousand miles before I hit the bed I had never left. That was a bad 'un! And yet it only lasted half of a quarter of a second. Then *Death Inst.*! I ask myself—'Is it, though'?"

"I swear, Mr. Poindexter—*inst.*!" I said.

The old hangman shook his head and said, "I ask you, what is *inst.*? You can live a whole lifetime in a second, in a dream . . . and what is a dream? *Inst.* However, my boy, all this is beside the point. I won't be at your shoulder to give you the office, so I must rely on you to take your own initiative, and not to let me down, young Balsam."

He became brisk. "Come on now, son, have you got your weights and measures right, first and foremost?"

"Height, five foot nine and a half inches," I said. "Weight, thirteen stone ten and a half pounds."

"Neck?"

"Seventeen inches, Mr. Poindexter, sir."

"Not very muscular, no."

"What drop will you allow?" asked old Poindexter.

I was not quite certain. I said, "I would have said six foot."

Poindexter cried, "Wait a minute! This client is a bit too heavy for the musculature of the neck—allow a five-foot drop."

"You're the boss, Mr. Poindexter."

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Apropos of nothing, as it seemed, Poindexter said, "You know, that Mrs. Nardwick—I never could get her out of my mind."

I could only say, "She was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until she was dead, and the Lord have mercy upon her soul, for poisoning her husband with arsenic."

"Weed killer," said Poindexter, correcting me. "You know, she was a kind-hearted woman. Long-suffering, too. Another woman would have done it with a hammer or a chopper or a knife. Only she was sensitive. That was her downfall. You know what? You might say that Nardwick worried himself and his wife to death.

"It might happen to anyone with a kind heart, don't you think, Balsam? Take the case of my Clara. She was a soft-hearted woman, and I kept her believing I was a tobacconist, to spare her feelings, you know. But when she found out why I had to go away every so often, she pined away.

"Another woman would have left me. Not Clara—she stayed, and she suffered. So what could I do but put something in her cocoa, to put her out of her misery? I ask you, now!"

I told him, "I must go, Mr. Poindexter. Are you sure you wouldn't like a bit of brandy?"

"No, thanks, my boy. Too old to learn new habits. See you at eight o'clock in the Yard. Keep a steady hand, remember, and synchronize, always synchronize . . . And oh, by the way, just to be on the safe side, better make that drop of mine five foot six," said Mr. Poindexter. "No point in tearing my skin, Balsam.

"Don't let me down, now."

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MISS PAISLEY ON A DIET

by JOHN PIERCE

. . . SO SHE ASKED ME IF SHE *could have one teensy olive. I said, "Help yourself."*

"And this constituted Miss Paisley's entire dinner for that evening?" "Well, no, not quite."

Who outside of Woodbourne would ever have heard of it but for the waiters in those chic candlelight cafés? *MAN KILLS WOMAN*—you would have noted and forgot it before you got off the page. Dining out with her was Crocker's error but, courting her good will and her signature, what else could he do?

Then a waiter talked, then three others and Sam (The Executioner) Madigan, who could smell a headline through a sewer pipe, burst out of retirement to prosecute—and the whole case went badly out of control. They had handcuffed Crocker even before he stopped dripping lake water, and in rolled the voyeurs and trialmongers to form sullen lines on the courthouse lawn.

I should never have been there, but I was. I had been put on a torturous regimen of injections and new antibiotics that stuffed my head and gummed my mental enginery, and so it all seemed subaqueously surreal. Smart-set waiters, like troglodytes, do not take well to open daylight; their suits rarely fit them and their complexions show green, and to see them wafting greenly about the witness stand while Madigan placed his darts, wove his web, all with that suave theatricity that had, in his time as District Attorney, sent 26 souls (seven of them, as it turned out, wildly innocent) to the chair—it was not an experience I would recommend. Every one of the waiters was such an outrageous liar, and that, it seemed to me, was the crux of the thing. One of the cruxes. Am I saying what it is I mean to say? I don't know.

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". . . and what happened then?" asks McCune, defense counsel for Crocker.

"She said, 'I puredee love radishes and they're not even fattening,' " Crocker answers tiredly, "and could she have just a weensy one? I told her, 'Go ahead . . .' "

For the emphasis on gastronomy, thank Madigan. The murder itself being cut-and-dried and good for at best a half hour's entertainment, one divined easily enough his strategy—the portrayal of Crocker as monster, establishing premeditation long before Crocker, claiming otherwise, ever got to the stand. Was this necessary, Crocker having been seen killing her? Yes or no, it gave Madigan the setting for his most dazzling footwork and richest sonorities, a display of forensic virtuosity so blinding, in short, as to leave you wondering about—Crocker's stinginess or his table manners or the murder of Eunice Paisley.

And what would become of her seashell collection?

He should have killed someone else. You do not, in a town the size of Woodbourne (43,503) deprive them of one of their most wholesome and progressive girls. Eunice—plain, plumpish, and unmarried at 31—was everywhere, teaching flower arranging at the Y.W., sparking the Annual Arts and Crafts Show, writing and performing for the Little Theatre, bobbing and smiling about church—unchanged since her high-school graduation. Subconsciously you might wish she *would* change in some way—go just one day without taking a hot casserole to someone or getting up a game of charades or stopping in to speak Spanish to the Puerto Rican grocer.

Eunice was the granddaughter and sole surviving relative of the late South American missionary, Guy Trumbull Paisley; this was how she came to meet Crocker, by whose hand she (allegedly) died. It is worth noting, as Madigan sights on Crocker as trencherman, that Paisley was himself devoured by a tribe of Upper Amazon savages whom he had sought to convert in Brazil.

". . . tell us," asks Madigan of a waiter from The Old Wagon Wheel, "what defendant ordered for him*self* that Monday night."

"For himself the seven-course roast beef dinner," replies the waiter, squinting against the unnatural light.

"And for Miss Paisley?"

"For the lady nothing at all."

"Nothing at all," tonelessly. "And then he—is this correct?—obliged her to sit watching him work his way through these seven courses while she had 'nothing at all?' "

"I—"

"Thank you, Mr. Wilson," says

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Madigan and, shaking his head in disbelief, walks sadly away.

Or I'm pretty certain that's how it went. I was under par and hardly need say I wasn't there voluntarily. I had gone to the courthouse because of a traffic fine on that August morning; I was walking the old marble-floored corridor with its flaking dun walls and execrable portraiture when the main doors flew open and the mob hurtled in like women at a department-store giveaway and I was thrown, clawed, booted, kidney-punched and half-nelsoned into that c o u r t r o o m where, spreadeagled across a wooden bench, I could only pray I wouldn't faint or throw up publicly or even die. I lacked the strength and the equilibrium to fight my way out again.

And here came W e l d o n Crocker, cellworn but emotionless in his $250 suit. The classic textbook syndrome: a brutal and senseless murder, a ravenous appetite, and not the slightest inkling that he'd done anything wrong. To be shown: How defendant lured deceased from a house of worship, reduced her by malnutrition to helplessness, committed her to the waters of Lake Caribou, and, still soaking wet and in handcuffs, asked where he might "pick up a hamburger or two." You wonder they didn't shoot him dead on the spot, Eunice being the grand girl she was.

Observe him, a nationally successful architect, gorging himself in the finest restaurants while she, poor thing, hunched behind her water glass in the candlelight, summons courage to ask him for that little olive or a radish or piece of gristle, any little uneaten scrap off his plate. A week of that and the energy she had expended and she couldn't have fought off a strong wind.

This, at any rate, was the way Sam Madigan painted it, and I should have thought it might behoove Crocker to heave a sigh now and then or make some forlorn facial play for the jury.

". . . and then?" asks McCune.

Crocker, eyes closed, pinches the bridge of his nose. "She . . . there were scallions in the bowl of ice and she said, 'Oh, scallions, I could eat them forever. Could I, would you mind if, just that little squinchety one right there?' "

"That what?" asks McCune.

"Squinchety one," m u r m u r s Crocker, seeming tired. "I told her, 'Be my guest.' " He fingered in his hand the nasal spray vial he used; I would not have sworn he hadn't smiled.

Was he all right in the head? Did he fathom his grim predicament? Caught in the act of deliberate murder and thrown into the pit with this backwoods Torquemada, Crocker worked on his nails with a pocket device and

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played with that nasal spray.

Which forces us back to the first crux. Why *should* he feign remorse if it was an accident as he claimed? Might he not have been the only honest man in the room? But it wasn't an accident, and that returns us to: Was he mad?

I am getting this all inside out. I was in no shape to be out of my sickbed, let alone wedged among girdled housewives in an antique courtroom moist with hate. It seemed—so much of it—such incredible baboonery, and so must my notes. Little that went on had logic or consecutiveness. I heard voices, saw movements, and retained blobs of dialogue, and so what was last is sometimes first; but then what real difference is it which waiter preceded which churchworker at such and such a time? What I offer derives from the split-screen process—on one side Madigan with his witnesses and on the other Crocker answering the questions of his own attorney, McCune. To present the proceedings otherwise would be to dishearten you before Crocker ever got to the stand.

". . . and now tell us about the shrimp cocktail," says McCune.

"Must I?" asks Crocker.

"Prosecution has laid great stress on these dinners."

"Well," weakly, "there was placed before me a shrimp cocktail. Miss Paisley quickly left off talking and fixed her eyes on the dish. She said, 'You forget how good shrimp are until you see them right before you,' and I said, 'Yes,' and she watched a bit longer and said, 'Could I maybe borrow just one little shrimpy?' ".

"One what?" asks McCune.

" 'One little shrimpy.' "

"This after the olives, radishes, and scallions?"

"No, I think that was another night. I told her, 'Of course,' and fed her one—" His voice granulated and fell away. "She ate it. She said, 'My, aren't they delicious,' and watched me even more closely and then said, 'If you don't mind I'm going to have just one more,' and did, and—"

"And?"

"I don't know," sighs Crocker. "Another and another and perhaps one more."

"And what was your mood at this time, Mr. Crocker?"

"Well, now, I'd come down here from Chicago to get her approval on the architectural design for the Forum and she still didn't want to talk about it just yet. That was my mood."

I believe I have left that out. The contract whereby Hale, Crocker and Gossett, Inc. of Chicago were selected to provide a design for the main, or administrative, or "Forum" Building of the Rev. Guy Trumbull Paisley

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Memorial Training Center (funds by world-wide subscription), Clause VIII (C), stipulated that final plans were subject to approval by the late Paisley's lone surviving relative, Eunice, who had donated 20 acres of her grandfather's land as well as his writings and certain personalia for a projected museum. While such confirmation—a tributary honor to the one who most loved him—was adjudged a mere formality, it had nevertheless to be obtained, and it was to this end that Crocker, thirteen months on the drawings, gave her of his time.

"I wish you'd come to me before you started them," Eunice is said to have told him. "I had a whole lot of ideas of my own."

Which is hardly the way $4,000,000 structures are best done.

And that clunk of a defense counsel of Crocker's. Where on earth had he ever found Nemo McCune? I refer particularly to his conduct during Madigan's interrogation of his prosecution witnesses, by the end of whom Crocker had been pile-driven to a depth from which not even Houdini could have worked free. While McCune doodled. Doodled on a scratchpad while not ten feet away Madigan howled and stomped into flinders every known ethic of courtroom procedure, and never a challenge or an objection or a word of cross-examination from McCune.

An example. Witness is Holman Wordley, a natty mustachioed waiter from the Grecian Palace Inn.

"You have testified," says Madigan, "that on the evening of Sunday, July 13, a day of worship, you did serve to the defendant the one-pound sirloin dinner and to the deceased not a crust, and you state that all through the dinner—*his* dinner—she stared hungrily at his plate."

"That is correct," says Wordley, adjusting his snappy bow tie.

"And was there not as well a look of abject terror in this famished church girl's eyes?"

"I would say—"

"The terror of a small-town orphan girl grown to selfless womanhood in the church's bosom and who, trying earnestly to be hospitable and of help to a stranger, wakes to find herself disillusioned and publicly humiliated by the greed and the gluttony of this big-city degenerate, and thus in fear of her very life?"

"Sir?" asks Wordley.

"Thank you," purrs Madigan and, turning, strolls past the defense with his matador's arrogance and tiny smile.

"No questions," says McCune, piddling about on his scratch pad. *He is at work on a picture of a horse.* Oh, you wanted to stran-

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gle him, pommel him to the floor, and shout into his ear that *his man faced the electric chair*; but how and *why* when Crocker himself—surely no dumbbell—sat rolling his head about with the nasal spray to his nose?

It was all so deplorably bad, loosing Crocker from his last hold on the underdog's prequisites, antagonizing, at the same time, every sordid bloodlust in the room. They had come in at dawn for a slashing, no-quarter duel between titans; they wound up instead with this charlatan. They had been properly cheated, and they knew by whom.

My opinion is that she fell in love with Crocker on that first Sunday. My wife Lucy, among others, is not so sure. Supply your own theories then, but with this stipulation: that you explain at the same time why other than for love any woman would submit night after night to that public degradation, then go running to his motel room with her collected *objets d'art*. Hypnosis, hints Madigan. Baloney, I say. All Crocker needed was her signature. Are we to believe that he, courting this approval, would jeopardize more than a year's work and a $4,000,000 project by that clownish treatment of her? I suppose he gave her what she asked for in her love.

But it would not surprise me to learn that she despised him.

Enough of mootables. The knowns are these: Crocker, driving his yellow convertible, checked into the Blue Moon Motel on Woodbourne's north outskirts on Saturday evening, the 12th of July. He found Eunice Paisley pouring coffee at church after the Sunday service and later that day received her in his quarters where she was introduced to the architectural plans. She suggested he take her to supper, and throughout the week to follow, through Friday inclusive, he was seen escorting her to dinner in all the better restaurants of Woodbourne where in every instance he himself dined magnificently while buying for her not an ort, chanking, or tithe.

Each night after this ceremony she drove to his appointments in her own vehicle, and it is known that his lights burned late and long. On Saturday he took her onto Lake Caribou, where shortly after the noon hour, in Georgic calm and in full view of three shoreline witnesses, Miss Paisley was forcibly disengaged from her soul.

I would wish there had been more time given to the Freuderies and metaphysics of the case and less to the culinary; but Madigan knew his audience, its hatreds and its mentality, and the framework within which he best shone. Crocker was his game plan and leitmotif and, like a dog with a

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down pillow, he mauled and shook it until only the husk remained.

What did the defendant order? Lobster? Was it a good, fresh lobster from Maine? Was the accompanying salad "nice and crisp?" What for Miss Paisley? *NOTHING?* Describe the poor girl's expression: Was she forced to watch Crocker dine?

And I saw something. I had let my eyes wander to the jurors and noticed this: Madigan had acceded to McCune's pressures toward a predominantly male jury (eight male, four female), but of the twelve seated there, twelve were grossly overweight, gourmands all.

"And did it not seem to you, Mr. Donohue," goes on Madigan, "that Miss Paisley, in her awful hunger, saw in this spectacle across the table the incarnation of those savages who had in the treacherous jungles of Brazil just as gluttonously eaten her beloved grandfather on whose very reputation and good works the defendant now sought to enrich himself?"

"I—"

"Thank you, Mr. Donohue."

"No questions," says McCune.

What a rout for Madigan! It was indicative of his cocksureness and his contempt for the opposition that, in this devotion to the table, he flaunted inconsistencies of the most porous sand.

"Mr. Crocker," says McCune in his turn, "much has been made by prosecution of your miserliness and your—here I quote—'squalid gluttony' and I will ask you to relate what did occur."

"All of it?"

"If you will."

"As I've said, Miss Paisley insisted that she was on a rigid diet and did not want anything, a stand she was to reaffirm every night we went out. I asked her to reconsider; she declined. So I ordered the sirloin steak."

"Do go on."

"There were some French fries and onion rings on the plate and I'd started to eat when she said, 'You know what I really like and am supposed not to eat? French fries. You wouldn't mind if I just—' 'Go ahead,' I told her. 'Oh, just one,' she said, 'but maybe an onion ring with it if it's okay.' Which it was. 'They really are nice and crisp, aren't they,' she said, reaching again, and so . . ."

"So?" prods McCune.

"Well, I still had the steak left, and picked up my fork again while she watched me. 'Weldon,' she said, 'that steak does evermore look heavenly. Do you think maybe just a wee smidgen off the corner—?' "

"A what?"

" 'A wee smidgen.' I cut her a third of it and shoved it across on the salad plate but she pro-

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tested and pushed it back after cutting off a bit. 'I only wanted a taste,' she said, chewing, 'but I didn't realize how divinely scrumptious it was. I think I'll, just that tiny part there near the bone . . .' "

He did not appear to me to be at all well. His eyes were fixed in the distance while he kneaded his hands.

"Go on, Mr. Crocker."

"She reached over to take my knife and cut the steak again and I said, 'Miss Paisley, *please* let me buy you a full portion. I'd love to and it's on the expense account anyway.' "

"And her reply?"

"It was as if I had offended her. She seemed put out that I would not respect her diet. I took her to her home. Then I drove around looking for a sandwich shop but everything was closed, so I went home. Miss Paisley was waiting outside my motel-room door in a lawn chair. She had brought over her record player and complete library of Joan Baez records and four notebooks of her poetry in manuscript that she wanted to read to me. She did, until four in the morning."

"And was further mention made of her decision as to the architectural plans?"

"She wanted more time."

It is regrettable that we could not have been shown the Forum plans, but we have seen Crocker's earlier works in *Life* and other magazines and may, from a generalized description, visualize what he had in mind—a severe, squat structure of mighty building blocks mounted high off the ground on rectangular pilings, and flanging, floor by floor, outward as it rises. There are deeply recessed rectangular windows and a vast, perfectly flat top. She thought the top should have something on it—a cross or a pair of great bronze lions, she wasn't sure.

One senses Crocker's discomfiture, but we can easily trace her machinations. A prolific and multitalented amateur craftsman in an acultural town, she had run at last athwart an artist of world-wide stature—a captive one, one could add—and went foraging through her cellars to bring artifacts of her own making for him to appraise.

Thus it was they gave Sunday night to her poetry, Monday to her clay sculpture, Tuesday to her water-color paintings, Wednesday to a reading of her antebellum novel, Thursday to costume jewelry, and Friday to a reading of her five-act expressionist play, each of these *oeuvres* lasting well into the predawn hours.

"I thought," says Crocker, grimacing terribly as he digs thumb and forefinger into his eyes (he definitely had a facial tic), "that Miss Paisley did perhaps have a certain raw talent and that the costume jewelry might be

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worth her working on after a thorough course of training; but I was very tired and often hungry and concerned with other matters, so I might not have been the best judge."

Meaning, I would suspect, that her work was abominable. Were it otherwise I'm sure Madigan would have produced an object or two and milked it for its bottom tear. No, not Madigan.

". . . you have stated earlier," says Madigan instead, "that you produced for the defendant the De Luxe Shore Dinner but for the deceased—*as on all other nights*—not a morsel."

"Right." He is Carleton Goss, a chinless waiter from the Red Salamander Grill.

"Now, Mr. Goss, in view of what was to occur in less than eighteen hours at Lake Caribou, did it not seem to you that already in this frightened girl's eyes there was a premonition of death, the realization on her part that he had made his dreadful decision and that in return for any movement she might make to take unto herself so much as a bread crumb or the uneaten tail of a shrimp, she was asking for a savage beating or even a knife in her gentle heart—?"

"*Ob*-jection!" thunders Judge Hoskins.

"Overruled," says Madigan.

"Shut up," rasps Hoskins. "I address myself to the Defense Counsel, Mr. McCune."

McCune has borrowed Crocker's nail clippers for a trim job. He looks up. "Me?"

"You," says Hoskins. "I would remind the Defense Counsel that his client is on trial for first-degree murder and that the death penalty obtains in this state. Is Counsel certain he is familiar with criminal court procedure? Has he had any previous trial experience?"

McCune leans to Crocker, who is inhaling deeply from his nasal spray—he has not yet been called to the stand. They confer in whispers. Says Crocker: "Counsel has had no previous trial experience."

"I was not addressing the defendant," shouts Hoskins, "but since I am: are you, sir, aware of the desperate gravity of your situation?"

"Objection," says McCune (laughter) and I grow faint with the idiocy of it all. They've done it now—riled Madigan as surely as if they'd pinned *KICK ME* to his back. Drawn from retirement by thoughts of national publicity, he is ignored, belittled, and upstaged by this low-comedy clown. His vengeance is a terrible thing to behold. Like a method dancer doing the bolero, he winds and goads himself to tornadic passions, dries his eyes with a foot-square handkerchief, pounds fist into palm with the shame of it, slinks, bounds, and crow-hops

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about the room until . . . until I could take it no more.

I *wanted* to get out but I couldn't. I could try making it to the door but I was certain I'd fall flat, and before these people and Associated Press in a town where I had important customers, how would that read? *DRUNK SALESMAN DISRUPTS MURDER TRIAL.* I fought to keep the morning's coffee down; if I heard one more word about food—

". . . and was the roast beef red and juicy?" asks Madigan.

". . . of what does the De Luxe Shore Dinner consist?" asks McCune.

"Of *fish*," blurts Crocker. His entire left cheek has begun to dance.

"Yes, but in detail, please."

"There is an oyster cocktail and then a plate of fried shrimp, fried scallops, fried oysters, and some kind of fish—sole, I think."

"And did Miss Paisley take an interest in this fare?"

"I pleaded with Miss Paisley to order *something*. I told her it was embarrassing to me, that I was uncomfortable . . . I had a marriage once, broken up by this bloated old dog of my wife's that sat by the dinner table with its eyes fastened onto my every move. I—"

"Defendant will lower his voice and answer the question," says the Judge.

"I said Miss Paisley was on a diet. She wanted nothing. But I did. Oh, how I did! 'Scallops are the *best* things,' she said, 'you wouldn't mind if I, that little teenchety one right there?' I speared it with a fork and held it over. She took it as if she were a hungry barracuda—"

"Objection," yells Madigan: disrespect for the dead; gurgitations of hatred from the feminine gallery, pounding of gavel sustained.

". . . and the shrimp and the oysters and the whole damn meal," shouts Crocker. "She ate all but two scallops of it and I dropped her off and went to a drive-in and bought three hamburgers and a triple order of French fries and a quart of bourbon and took it all home, all of it to the motel. But there was Miss Paisley waiting outside the door with her five-act expressionist play! I said, 'Miss Paisley, I'm in no shape to listen to you read your play. I've had no sleep, I've lost twelve pounds, I've work to do, and you haven't done the first thing about these plans and—" His voice broke and his eyeballs rolled skyward into his forehead until nothing was left but the whites.

"And her answer?"

"She was already inside. She said, 'Is that French fries I smell?' "

Good old McCune. He'd slip-

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ped one by Madigan all right. *It was Crocker who had starved*—Crocker who had lost twelve pounds on Eunice Paisley's diet while she had gained nine; and all that this little coup would cost McCune was Crocker's life. In one sweep he'd done what Madigan and all his witnesses and the whole police force couldn't do: produce the motive.

Oh, that McCune!

"We come to Saturday," he says. "You are found on that morning in the middle of Lake Caribou with your architectural drawings and Miss Paisley in a canoe."

"Correct," murmurs Crocker, his eyes closed.

"Will you describe the seating arrangement?"

"I was toward the stern where you paddle. She faced me from the forward end."

"Was there any conversation between you?"

"She had given some thought to the plans for the Forum. She would withdraw all her other suggestions if I'd substitute round for rectangular windows—to c o m - memorate her grandfather's love of the sea."

"And what was your reaction?"

"I didn't have time to have one. I was opening the box lunch of fried chicken that I'd brought and Miss Paisley stopped talking. 'Is that,' she said, 'oh, did they include the *livers?*'—and she stood up in the canoe to walk toward me and over went everything—me, drawings, chicken, Miss Paisley, canoe."

"You were not until then aware that she could not swim?"

"I never asked."

"Now, Mr. Crocker, t h r e e persons on shore at the time have testified that they saw you next to Miss Paisley in the water and that you were beating her on the head with the heavy, or rounded end of the canoe paddle. Is this true?"

"It's one of the first precepts of lifesaving. You've got to subdue an hysterical person if he's not to drown the both of you. And Miss Paisley was q u i t e hysterical. She was very hard to subdue."

"Then this action was, in effect, an act of lifesaving."

"Yes—but a futile attempt. Quieting her, I lost my strength. Then I couldn't find her—"

"*KILL HIM!*" shrieked a voice, and the room erupted around and on top me. *There* was an experience—being in the eye of it one moment and at home in my own bed the next. A thrown book, someone told me, h u r l e d presumably at Crocker, missed Crocker, and hit me. I slept through the riot and was carried out . . .

I recover. Lucy nurses me. The drugs were a mistake on all levels

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and have been recalled by the government for further testing. I am bald. I may sue.

They would not let me read or hear of the trial for the longest time, but then it was a long time before they gave up on, and discharged, the jury. Eight fat men stood for acquittal, four plump women against. Nothing would change them, and with Madigan gone—moved forever to Mexico—it is not likely they'll try Crocker again. Passions have cooled; civic dignity prevails. How best can Woodbourne profit—from Crocker persecuted or Crocker as the creator of a structure drawing tourists from round the world?

Duplicate drawings were located. Work on the Forum has begun. You see Crocker's name on the Woodbourne society pages now and again, breaking bread with the local *haut monde.*

I see him. He traverses the buffet and works his way fully laden through the adoring crowds. Breaking clear, he walks splendidly across the lawn and, far away, takes position behind a tool shed. There, crouching furtively, ever watchful, he begins to dine.

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

This is the 7th in the series about Nick Velvet, the fussy felon who never steals the ordinary, the usual, or the valuable—only the extraordinary, the unusual, or the seemingly valueless. This time Nick is hired (for his minimum fee of $20,000 to steal a cheap plaster-of-Paris lion—but, as always, there are unexpected complications . . .

THE THEFT OF THE LAUGHING LIONS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

IT WAS THE SORT OF SUMMER day when the choppy waters of Long Island Sound beckoned to Nick Velvet. Often on such days Gloria would sail with him on the little sloop, relaxing with a beer while he guided the boat carefully through the swells. But on this day he was alone, and so was hardly prepared for the shapely young mermaid who suddenly boosted herself over the side while he was still two hundred yards from shore.

"Hi!" she announced. "I'm Ran."

He took in her glistening bikini approvingly. "Callipygian," he said, half to himself. "Welcome aboard."

"What was that?"

He smiled. "It's a compliment of sorts, from the Greek. Anyway, who are you? I didn't know mermaids came this close to shore."

"I'm Ran—Ran Brewster. And you're Nick Velvet, the thief."

"I have other names and far more flattering descriptions." He turned the rudder slightly. "Is that Ran as in run? Short for Randy?"

She picked up a handy towel and began to dry herself, starting with her dripping blonde hair.

"Short for nothing. Ran, the Scandinavian sea goddess, drag-

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ged down ships and drowned sailors. My father never liked the water."

"I guess not. Maybe you'd better get off my boat. I'm too young to be dragged down by a sea goddess."

"Funny, I'd have thought you were just the right age."

He lit a cigarette and studied her. The talk was cheerful, but she hadn't come swimming all the way out to his boat just for banter. "What do you want me to steal?" he asked. "I charge twenty thousand—minimum."

"It may be a little out of your line."

He shrugged. "Tell me about it." Nothing was really out of his line, except the usual valuable things, like cash or jewels. He stole only the unusual, the seemingly valueless. From the way she'd approached him on Long Island Sound, he had no doubt that her request would be unusual.

"You know Phil Rumston?"

"I guess everybody knows Phil Rumston." He was a favorite of the tabloids and the columnists, a guaranteed newsmaker who always had something to say. His Capital Clubs, with scantily clad "Lion Tamers" functioning as waitresses, had sprung up in a half dozen state capitals during the past two years, and another dozen were in the works.

"I want you to steal something from him—or from one of his clubs, to be more exact."

"The prospect intrigues me. Tell me more."

She'd finished drying her hair and was now toweling her long slender legs. Obviously she had no immediate plans for returning to the water. "In each of Rumston's clubs there are plaster lions on the tables—laughing lions, he calls them. They're about twelve inches high, with their heads thrown back and their mouths open. To me it has always looked more like an expression of hunger than laughter, but that's beside the point."

"Why lions?" Nick wanted to know.

"It's the club theme. Their customers are referred to as Legislative Lions, and the waitresses are called Lion Tamers. The clubs are open to anyone willing to pay the dues, of course, but their location in the various state capitals gives them a natural popularity with members of state legislatures—at least, during the legislative sessions."

Nick Velvet smiled. "Can't I steal a Lion Tamer?"

"Nothing so glamorous. I only want one of the plaster lions from a table."

"Any one?"

She hesitated. "Yes, to start with. But I may need another one later."

"Why don't you just walk in with a full coat some night and

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sneak one out as a souvenir? Girls must do it all the time, and it would save you twenty grand."

She shook her head. "First of all, it's not that easy. The lions are bolted to the tables to prevent just such souvenir collecting. And second, I want this to look like a robbery, not a prank."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"I understood you didn't ask questions."

Nick shrugged. "I don't. What cities are the clubs in?"

"Rumston's scheme is to ultimately have them in all fifty state captials, plus Washington, D.C. So far he has six open—in Hartford, Boston, Trenton, Harrisburg, Denver, and Sacramento."

"What's your interest in him?"

She smiled. "No questions, remember? Just deliver the plaster lion and you'll get your money." She glanced toward the shoreline. "You heading in?"

"I was, until you climbed aboard. Now I think I might like to stay out a while longer."

"Sorry, but I have to get back."

Reluctantly Nick turned the boat shoreward.

Nick spent the following day at the public library, reading all the publicity he could find on Phil Rumston and the Capital Clubs. And there was much to read, since Rumston was perhaps the most talkative person in the public eye. No secret of his past was too petty or dirty not to be exposed in the press. Readers of the tabloids and the shadier magazines already knew the details of his life with various mistresses, of the wife and child he'd deserted in his youth, and even of the brief homosexual experience he'd had during his college days.

For all of that, Phil Rumston seemed to be an open, friendly man, accepted by all. Perhaps it was because he moved chiefly in political circles, where a glad hand and a knowing smile carried a great deal of weight. In any event, Rumston was popular and his clubs were popular. The first one had been opened in his hometown of Hartford, and this had been quickly followed by one in Boston. At first he'd wanted to call them Lion Clubs, but when the fraternal order of the same name had threatened a lawsuit he'd quietly changed them to Capital Clubs.

Nick Velvet had never been in one before he walked through the doors of the Trenton club early on a Saturday evening. He was a bit startled by the red plush walls and the beaded curtains, which suggested a turn-of-the-century smoke-filled-room atmosphere that he'd have thought politicians would want to avoid. But just the opposite was apparently the case, and even with

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the State Senate and the General Assembly not in session the club was doing a reasonably good business.

The Lion Tamers' costumes, as he'd expected, were cut low in front and back. One girl, a tall dimpled blonde, had asked for his membership card when he entered, but she'd been more than willing to accept ten dollars as a payment on dues and give him a temporary card.

He stood at the bar, sipping a tall Scotch and water, and examined the plaster lions in the center of each table. He even went over to touch one on a vacant table, confirming the fact that they were loosely bolted in position. The lions were about a foot high, sitting on their haunches and howling—or laughing—at the ceiling. The whole caper seemed much too easy.

Nick located the intricate panel controlling the room's indirect lighting system. He glanced over the line of dimmers and switches, and picked the one that seemed most likely to be the main switch. A man in a dinner jacket, who seemed to be the club manager, turned at that moment, saw him, and started over. "What are you doing there?"

Nick threw the switch, plunging the windowless room into darkness, then turned the dimmer knobs to their lowest point. Even if someone managed to throw the main switch back on, the room would remain almost dark until they realized that the dimmers had been turned down too.

There were shouts from the guests, and a few screams from the scantily clad Lion Tamers. Nick ignored them, moving quickly toward the nearest empty table. The manager tried to grapple with him and Nick shoved him aside, none too gently. He grabbed the table, upsetting ashtrays and glassware, felt beneath the table for the bolt, found it, and turned the nut. In a matter of moments he had the Laughing Lion.

He'd just got it under one arm when the lights came back on, gradually brightening as the dimmers were turned up. "Stop him!" the man at the switch shouted, but the guests and girls were too confused to act. Nick glanced around, spotted a service door to the kitchen area, and bounded through it, upsetting a tray-bearing waiter as he charged through.

His rented car was a block away. He wasn't even sweating when he reached it.

Before Nick delivered the lion to Ran Brewster he took it to a doctor he knew and had it x-rayed. Call it curiosity, or just caution that comes with years in the business.

"Nothing but plaster," the doc-

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tor reported. Nick shrugged and went on his way.

On Monday afternoon he delivered the statue to Ran at her New York apartment. She greeted him at the door wearing an electric-pink lounging robe and not much else. "My, you're a fast worker."

"I've had more difficult assignments. Do you have the money?"

She hesitated. "Let me examine it first. Phone me in an hour."

Nick nodded agreeably.

When he phoned later, she seemed quite disturbed. "Bad news," she told him. "I'll need another one."

"That wasn't in our agreement."

"I said I might need another. I'll pay a little extra."

"The second one will be harder to get."

"I know." She thought about it. "Try the Hartford club—that's the main one."

It rained all day in the Connecticut capital, a chilling, depressing sort of rain that spoke more of autumn than the beginning of summer. Patrons at the bar in the Capital Club were grumbling about the weather, about the golf they were missing or the sailing they had to pass up. They grumbled and ordered more drinks, and Nick Velvet drank along with them.

The redheaded Lion Tamer at the door had questioned his temporary membership card, but only for a moment. He obviously had money to spend, and they were glad to take it. After two drinks he drifted upstairs to the second floor, heading for the Men's Room but detouring to a private dining room that was apparently open only on weekends. There was a sea of tables in the empty room, each with a Laughing Lion in its center.

He stepped behind a door as two Lion Tamers went by, chatting on their way to the employees dressing room. Watching their legs in the low silver boots they wore, Nick held his breath and hoped they wouldn't sense his presence. But then they were gone and he went back into the empty room, heading for the nearest table.

Just as his fingers touched the lion, a pert voice behind him announced, "Sorry, sir, but only the main-floor rooms are open this evening."

"Oh?" He turned to smile at the redheaded Lion Tamer who'd been at the door when he entered the club. "This is my first time, here and I was just looking around."

He went back downstairs and thought about another plan. The first theft had been easy, but the same trick with lights wouldn't work here. For one thing, the manager never seemed to leave the area of the switches. So Nick

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smoked a cigarette, ordered another drink, and settled down on a bar stool to wait a while.

After ten minutes he rose, went upstairs and then down the dim passage to the Men's Room. Inside he glanced around and spotted a wire basket for discarded paper towels. He pulled out several fresh ones and crumpled them into the basket, dampening them first so they'd give off plenty of smoke. Then he threw a couple of lighted matches into the basket on top of them. There wouldn't be enough of a fire to do real damage, but he hoped the smoke would serve to confuse things for a few precious minutes.

He left the Men's Room and had just reached the private dining room when he heard someone shout, "There's a fire in here!"

He turned on the dim lights and closed the door behind him, going quickly to the nearest table where he began to unbolt the plaster lion.

"Freeze, mister!" a voice warned behind him.

Nick turned slowly and stared into the muzzle of a .38 automatic held in the hand of a burly bearded man. A door leading to the kitchen opened and two other armed men came in fast.

Nick cursed silently and raised his hands. The whole thing had been too easy from the beginning. He'd been careless, and now he'd have to pay the consequences.

"I was just looking around," he explained lamely.

"Sure, mister," the bearded man retorted. "We'll see what Mr. Rumston thinks about it."

They took him to an office on the top floor, where he was kept under armed guard for nearly an hour. At last the bearded man returned and motioned him to his feet. "Mr. Rumston will see you now."

Nick followed him into the hall, aware of the other man's gun pointed at his back. One thing seemed clear—they didn't intend to phone the police or they'd have done it long ago. His captors led him into a more palatial office where a tall handsome man with dark hair and fashionable sideburns waited behind a wide oak desk.

Nick recognized Rumston at once from his pictures. The expensive suit, the trace of a smile playing about his lips—all contributed to the image the man had created in the public press. He had the look of a young liberal politician—a lawyer look, but more than that. Though Nick knew him to be in his early forties, he could easily have passed for ten years younger.

"Well," he said by way of greeting.

"This is all a mistake," Nick began, trying to bluff.

"You're Nick Velvet, aren't you?"

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There was no choice but to admit it. "I seem to be known here."

"In certain circles you're quite well-known," Phil Rumston said. "After the trouble at the Trenton club we've been on our toes. The Lion Tamer who found you upstairs reported to Frazier here." He motioned toward the bearded man. "Frazier is my operations manager."

"I see," Nick said calmly.

The beard nodded, but did not lower his gun. Then Rumston asked, "Who hired you, Velvet?" The smile disappeared as he spoke, just for a moment.

"That's my business. Professional confidence."

"Nuts! You were hired by Ran Brewster, weren't you?"

Nick shrugged. "You seem to know all the answers."

Rumston pulled open a desk drawer and handed Nick a letter. "Read that!"

It was typed, but he had little doubt that it had come from Ran. *"Mr. Rumston! Now I know your shabby secret. Soon the whole world will know unless you pay me one hundred thousand dollars.* It was signed *Ran,* and dated a few days earlier.

"She's *blackmailing* you?" Nick was genuinely surprised. The man seated before him had had his entire private life revealed in the public press—seduction, desertion, even homosexuality. What could be left to blackmail him about? "I thought you once told a reporter that you were a man without any secrets."

Rumston nodded. "I did, didn't I?" He was glum now. "She talked to somebody, a club manager I thought I could trust. He's gone now."

"Can she send you to prison?"

"I wouldn't mind that so much. Frazier here could manage the clubs. I'm right on the verge of getting them into five more state capitals."

"Well, then, what—?"

"What is she blackmailing me about? Really, Mr. Velvet, you can't expect me to tell you that!"

Nick was beginning to grow restless. His eyes scanned the room for a way out, but there was none. "Then what do you intend to do?"

Phil Rumston leaned back in his chair, swiveling it a bit. "I know your reputation, Velvet. You steal things. Right?"

"That's right."

"Anything?"

"Anything not valuable. I don't steal money or jewels or valuable art objects, because there are too many others doing that sort of work already. I steal things of little or no value, on assignment."

"How much is she paying?"

My usual rate is twenty thousand dollars. For especially dangerous jobs I get thirty thousand dollars."

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"And you never turn down an assignment?"

"Not if it falls within the range of my activities."

Phil Rumston sighed. He seemed pleased with himself once more, and the smile crept back to his lips. "Very well. Then I'm hiring you to steal the lion back from Ran Brewster. The one from the Trenton club, and any others you might have got."

Nick was silent for a moment. Finally he said, "I'm not sure."

"Thirty thousand to steal them back. I don't care about the Trenton one as much as the others."

"How do you know there are others?"

"She sent me this note. She must have something." He rummaged around for a cigarette and lit it. "Think about it, Velvet. You've got no reason to turn me down."

"Give me some time," Nick said. "I've never been hired to steal anything back before."

"Look," Rumston's tone hardened. "Frazier could have shot you as a thief. He still can. But I'm a businessman, not a gangster. I'm making you a straight business offer."

Nick thought about Ran Brewster. "Why is she blackmailing you?" he asked.

"That's no concern of yours."

"Did you foreclose the mortgage on her old dad's homestead?"

"Something like that," Rumston admitted. "It was a long time ago. This is just a grudge thing with her."

"It can't have been too long ago. The girl's barely twenty."

"She's old enough to be blackmailing me!"

"Yes," Nick admitted.

"Will you do it? You really don't have any choice."

"Yes, I suppose so."

That night he was back in Manhattan, and the following day he paid a call on Ran Brewster. She seemed surprised to see him so soon, but far from disappointed. "You've got another lion?" she asked eagerly.

"No." He lit a cigarette and sat down. "You're blackmailing Rumston, aren't you?"

"My! That's coming right to the point! Has he spoken to you?"

"Yes."

"And bought you off, I suppose."

"Not exactly. Why are you blackmailing him?"

"That's none of your business. You're being well paid to do a job, Mr. Velvet, and I expect you to do it."

"I'd like to know just where I stand."

"If you want your money, I need at least one more lion. That's where you stand."

"Obviously the lions are tied in with the blackmail. Where's the

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one I brought you already?"

She was looking tensely at him. "Can I trust you? Can I trust any man?"

"You sound as if you've had a bad experience. Were you one of his Lion Tamers?"

"No."

He glanced around the apartment, wondering where she'd hidden the lion. "Well?" he asked finally. "Do you trust me?"

"I suppose it has to start somewhere, doesn't it?" she decided with a sigh. "I'll get it for you, and I'll tell you why it's worth twenty thousand dollars to me."

Something clicked in Nick Velvet's brain.

He didn't need to steal the lions back after all. Not now.

"Never mind," he said suddenly. "I have to go."

"Where, in such a hurry?"

"Back to Hartford."

He returned to the original Capital Club in Hartford. From a booth across the street he called and asked to speak to Rumston.

"Yes?"

"Nick Velvet. I thought we should have another little talk. I was wondering if you might want to go sailing with me on the Sound. My boat's docked only an hour from here."

"Too busy, and I never liked the water anyway. You can talk over the phone."

"I have some bad news."

"What's that?"

"I can't accept your assignment."

"Why not?"

"I only steal things with little or no value. Those lions are very valuable to Ran Brewster right now. She's paying me twenty thousand dollars for them."

"But—"

"That makes them some sort of art work—valuable art work. Outside my field, so I can't steal them back."

"Nuts, Velvet! You've fallen for her, haven't you?"

"I hope not."

"Where are you now?"

"In Hartford."

"Then come up here where we can talk about this."

"I'll be there in five minutes."

The club was all but deserted at this afternoon hour, with only a few Lion Tamers visible and a bored-looking cleanup man vacuuming the carpet. Nick took the elevator to Rumston's office, pausing only to glance into the private dining room on the second floor. He was not surprised to see that nearly half the tables were without their plaster lions.

Rumston was waiting for him, standing by the wide picture window that overlooked Broad Street. "Now what is all this?" he demanded.

"I told you on the phone. I can't do it."

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"That's final?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I'll send Frazier to do it, then. I hope he doesn't have to hurt her."

Nick felt his muscles tighten. "It's too late to try for the girl," he said carefully. "I have two more lions."

Phil Rumston frowned. "What the hell is this? A double cross?"

"I never agreed to work for you. When I decided I couldn't steal her lions back, I went after a couple more—to sort of complete her set."

"You don't have any more lions. If you do, they're useless to you. The important ones are locked up in the next room."

"Are they?" Nick smiled. "Why don't you take a look?"

"I will."

He stepped into the next office, closing the door behind him. He was just reaching for one of the plaster lions when Nick Velvet opened the door and crossed quickly to his side. Before Rumston could react, Nick's gun was pressed against the back of his head.

"I'll take two of those lions," he said. "I don't want to hurt you, so hand them over."

Ran Brewster was waiting at the door of her apartment. She pressed her hands together in a gesture of relief when she saw that Nick was carrying a package.

"You got another lion!"

"That's right. Two for good measure."

She led him into the apartment, closing the door behind him. "Great! Here's your money." She was smiling as she added, "Now you can go back to your boat and wait for another mermaid."

He thought about the waters of the Sound and how pleasant they'd be. But he couldn't quite desert her like this. "I flew down from Hartford. Rumston and his ape Frazier might not be far behind."

"Rumston won't hurt me," she said confidently.

"How can you be so sure? I don't know what you've got against him, but I'd suggest you abandon this blackmail scheme. He won't stand for it. If you've got twenty grand to pay me, you're not poor. The money can't mean that much to you."

"It means a great deal to me. More than you'll ever know."

"Rumston can make millions from his clubs. He doesn't want you in the way."

She was busy examining one of the lions. "You don't know about him."

"That's where you're wrong, Miss Brewster. I know, for instance, the secret of these lions. I stopped in to see a doctor and had them x-rayed."

"And what was the doctor's diagnosis?"

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"A mild digestive upset caused by a tiny microphone in the lion's mouth, connected to a radio transmitter in the stomach. That was the secret Phil Rumston would be blackmailed about. His chain of Capital Clubs is an elaborate cover for an information gathering network. Information about pending legislation, highways, taxes, bonds—information that can be worth big money sold to the right people."

Nick was so intent on what he was saying that he didn't hear the apartment door open behind him. When Ran gasped, he turned quickly and found that it was too late. Rumston and Frazier had come through the door from the hallway, and the bearded man had his gun out. Nick sighed and raised his hands.

"How did you get in?" Ran gasped.

Rumston smiled. "I still have a key from the old days. I never throw anything away. And a private plane that's almost as fast as the one that brought Velvet here." He turned to Nick. "Hello again, Mr. Velvet. I didn't expect we'd meet again so soon."

"My pleasure," Nick said.

Frazier had circled behind them with the gun. "Don't harm the girl," Rumston cautioned. "But if Velvet moves, shoot him dead."

"Right," Frazier growled.

"Now just how much do you know, Velvet?"

"Enough. I know that some of the Laughing Lions at each of your clubs are rigged with a mike and radio transmitter. They don't have to be very powerful—just enough to pick up conversations at a table and transmit them maybe a hundred feet to your taping equipment. State senators and legislators do a lot of talking, especially after dinner and with a few drinks in them. You make sure the important people are seated at tables with bugged lions, and by fitting together the information you're able to sell it, or use it yourself to buy land and make investments.

"That's what you feared worse than jail, Rumston—that this girl would expose your b u g g i n g operation. The first lion I stole for her wasn't bugged, so she had to have another. Just the word of a disgruntled club manager wasn't enough, but with one of the bugged lions as evidence she could put you out of business overnight."

"But now I've got you two *and* the lions," Rumston said.

"Take them!" Ran Brewster shouted defiantly. "I'll still find a way to ruin you!"

He took a step forward, and perhaps she thought he was going to strike her. She grabbed one of the Laughing Lions and hurled it at his head. The whole thing was a blur in Nick's eyes as the statue shattered against the wall.

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Rumston made a move toward the girl and she turned, aiming the other lion at the bearded Frazier. Nick saw his finger whiten on the trigger of his gun, and Nick took a step to intervene.

But Rumston was faster. "No!" he shouted. "I told you not to hurt her!" He pushed Ran out of the way just as Frazier's gun roared.

The bullet caught Phil Rumston in the chest, high up. He coughed and went down hard, spitting blood.

"Call an ambulance!" Nick told the girl, knocking the gun from Frazier's hand.

"My God! I didn't mean to shoot him! He got in the way!"

"Yeah," Nick said. He bent over the fallen man and tried to stop the blood.

"He got in the way! He stepped right in front of the gun!"

Then Ran Brewster was on her knees by Rumston's side, sobbing softly. "Will he live?" she asked.

"Damned if I know," Nick Velvet answered.

Phil Rumston died at the hospital two hours later, while Ran pressed her head against Nick's jacket and the police questioned Frazier. Finally, when it was over, Nick helped her down the long hospital corridor, passing little areas of light that broke the line of dimness.

"The police will have more questions," he told her. "We forgot to take your apartment key out of his pocket."

"Yes," she answered. "Maybe I should tell them everything."

Nick pushed the button for the elevator. "If he meant that much to you, why did you want to ruin him?"

"I guess you wouldn't understand," she said. "It was a long time ago, so long ago."

"That's what he said too." And then Nick remembered something. He remembered Rumston saying he didn't like the water, and he remembered what Ran had said about her name. "He walked out on you?"

"Oh, he did that, all right. Way back. He walked out on my mother and me." He lifted her shoulders and wiped her nose as they entered the elevator. "He was my father."

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The code and cipher story—the story of concealed communications—is coming back. Now John Abbott has turned his code man, Edward Brady, into a series character—and we, for two, are grateful for the renaissance of the secret-message tale.

Would you like to know what we liked so much about Mr. Abbott's second Brady story? Well, it's simple. That's it—it's simple! As simple as ABC—if *you see it . . .*

THE ABC CODE

by JOHN ABBOTT

THE CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE found Brady in the Staff Dining Room. The code expert was attacking a grapefruit and blinking tearfully at the stinging counterattack.

"Forget breakfast," the Chief snapped. "There has been a kidnaping; we need you at once." He turned and walked briskly to his office. Brady surrendered to the grapefruit and followed, his tongue trolling for a seed that had slipped under a denture.

In the Chief's office an army major and a woman were arguing heatedly; she was cringing, yet shaking her head stubbornly.

"I tell you, madam—"

They became silent as the Chief entered and waved Brady to a chair. Indicating Brady to the couple he said, "This is our top code man, Mr. Brady. He will make a decision on the letter." Then facing Brady, the Chief said ominously, "You may as well know the worst, Edward. It's Ralph Poindexter they've snatched."

Brady whistled. He knew more about the abducted man than merely his recent fame in defense work. At the age of twelve Ralph Poindexter had constructed a machine that would amplify and record the heartbeat of an insect; at sixteen he was graduated from MIT *summa cum laude*; now, at twenty-nine, he was pioneering the development of a new anti-missile missile.

Brady turned to the woman. "You're Mrs. Poindexter?"

She seemed to brighten a bit. "Yes, yes, I am. And there *is* a code in that letter, Mr. Brady. I just know there is."

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"Please, madam," the major said stiffly. Then at the Chief's request he related the events leading up to the kidnaping.

"This morning Ralph Poindexter and two other scientists were to address the United Nations on the problems of policing outer space. The World Peace Seekers—the WPS—had arranged for a demonstration outside the UN Building. Oh, it was orderly enough—the usual picket line of placard-carrying hippies shouting slogans and passing out pamphlets.

"When our limousine pulled up to the curb they began to crowd around it in a hostile manner. We had some awkward moments threading our way through the tangle of protesters; I was buffeted about somewhat myself. Once inside the building we were regrouping and commenting on the rude reception when we noticed that Ralph was missing. We waited a few moments, then ran out to the sidewalk, but he was nowhere to be seen—and neither were the protesters. They had swallowed him up and disappeared."

"Outrageous," Brady murmured. "Did I hear Mrs. Poindexter mention a letter? Was it a ransom note of some sort?"

"I was just getting to that. As soon as it was apparent that Ralph was missing, we made contact with the police and the FBI. They already have men at the airport, railroad station, and bus terminals; every highway leading out of the city is sealed off; and Poindexter's picture is being shown on local television every fifteen minutes. The WPS can't leave the city with him but, on the other hand, we haven't the slightest clue to where they're holding him prisoner."

"Except the letter," said Mrs. Poindexter doggedly.

"What? Oh, all right," the major said wearily. "There were two letters involved, actually. One was the usual ransom note, mailed to the department, demanding half a million dollars for his safe return. The other was received by Mrs. Poindexter. Evidently they wanted to prove they really do have him." He paused. "But the letter to Mrs. Poindexter, well—"

"Yes?" Brady prompted.

"Better read it for yourself. Here."

Brady opened the sheet of notepaper and read:

Dear Lois:

I am well and unharmed. There is no need for you to worry. If Intelligence will cooperate and pay the ransom I will be allowed to return home. As evidence of their good faith I am being given this chance to write to you. Since I may be away for a few days, there are two things I should mention.

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First, about the car. Please have it checked for anti-freeze and new snow tires.

The other thing is Bobby's progress at school.

I received a call from his homeroom teacher, Mr. Morse. When he read Bobby's test marks to me I was aghast. They're listed below, just as I jotted them down, so you can see how his marks have been getting progressively worse.

Lois, there is no need for C's on Bobby's report. You must talk to him. A boy as bright as Bobby should get only A's and B's.

Love,
Ralph

English	A B B B B
Math	A A B B B
Science	A C C C C
Latin	A B A A C
French	B B C C C

Brady looked from the letter to the major. "It seems routine enough."

"Think so? Tell him, Mrs. Poindexter."

"Oh, Mr. Brady," she cried. "We don't have a son. We never did."

They were all suddenly embarrassed, looking away from each other. The Chief broke the silence by explaining to Brady the conflicting opinions of the letter.

"The army feels that the WPS may be torturing Poindexter for scientific data on the new anti-missile, and that he may have temporarily lost contact with reality because of the ordeal he is undergoing. On the other hand, Mrs. Poindexter feels there is a hidden message in the letter, that her husband was giving us information as to where they are holding him."

"An interesting theory," Brady admitted, "and one worth checking out. May I read the letter again?"

But he did more than read it. Reaching for a pencil and scratch paper he began to write rows of letters, then erase them and start anew. As he worked, a faint smile flickered across his face, making him look younger; this soon gave way to a broad grin.

The Chief of Intelligence was well acquainted with these signs.

"Edward," he said, "you've found something?"

Brady nodded and proffered the result of his efforts. "Here is the address. Let's hope they are still holed up there when your men arrive."

As the Chief barked commands into his intercom, Mrs. Poindexter pinioned Brady and kissed his reddening cheeks. The army major muttered congratulations and said that, for the record, he wanted to know how Brady had discovered the code.

Disengaging himself gently from Mrs. Poindexter, Brady said,

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I can take little credit for breakıg this code; I merely followed oindexter's instructions. If you ecall, he wrote that there was o need for C's on the list of st marks received by the naginary son, Bobby. So I copied own the marks without the C's nd had this:

A B B B B
A A B B B
A
A B A A
B B

this *was* a code, it consisted f only two letters. But in a twotter code, unless the letters are ı different sizes, they cannot reresent all twenty-six letters of ıe alphabet."

Despite himself, the major was arming to the puzzle. "If there as no need for the C's why ıclude them at all?"

"For naturalness, sir—to fill ut the report card and make oindexter's letter sound nsuspicious. The one thing he id not want to do was draw ıspicion to the test marks."

"All right. Then what?"

"Well, there *is* one code in hich two symbols, in various ombinations, can represent all ıe letters of the alphabet. Poinexter simply had to substitute the tters A and B for these two mbols."

"And what code is that?"

Brady grinned again. "The dotash code—in this case, the International one, not the American."

The major groaned; the Chief groaned; but Mrs. Poindexter beamed.

"I merely substituted dots for the letter A and dashes for the letter B, then had this:

1
2

E
L
M

"I told you," Mrs. Poindexter said proudly, "that my husband is a brilliant improviser."

"More than you realize," Brady continued. "For you see, your husband gave us *another* clue to the letter's hidden message, one you may have overlooked."

"What was that?"

"I saw that using the name of Bobby for the nonexistent son would make the letter look more believable to the WPS. But why, I wondered, did he also give us the name of Bobby's home-room teacher? It would have been enough to mention him without a specific name. So the name of the home-room teacher had to be significant, and it was—a bold bid by Poindexter to tell us what code to look for in case we failed to decode the test marks."

The three of them crowded around the letter. It was the major who exclaimed:

"Morse!"

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a NEW crime story by

STEPHEN BARR

An unusual story, and a strange one . . . About panhandlers in New York City in the early 1930's, in the Depression days; and particularly about Jimmy, a "moocher" with a special kind of hypnotism, a "touch artist" who had once been an extra in the silent movies and who could spout Latin for every occasion . . .

SPREADEAGLE AND SCRAM

by STEPHEN BARR

I FIRST MET JIMMY THE PRIEST in 1931, at which time Prohibition had more or less settled down, and one didn't have to be known at a cordial shop to buy liquor. Jimmy's sobriquet had nothing to do with the place where Eugene O'Neill and his friends used to gather—it was given him by the other panhandlers because when Jimmy had drunk too much red wine he would say that he had once studied for the priesthood. He said that nothing had come of it because women always got the better of him.

The first part of this struck me as plausible as he seemed well-read and occasionally would say things in Latin. My Latin was too rudimentary to understand it all, but it was certainly more than he could have picked up merely by going to Mass. I realized eventually that even if it were true about the priesthood, his undoing was more like caused by wine than by women.

Jimmy was not what one would call a wino, but drinking was central in his life. I never saw him really drunk or even unsteady, but nearly every morning I happened to run into him he had a hangover and the shakes. For one thing, he did not look like a beggar—he was always clean and shaved, and his clothes looked all right, at least until one got close enough to see the frayed edges. The first

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ime I saw him he was walking toward me, and I thought he was going to pass me by, but at the last moment he turned, gave me a bright smile, and asked for a ight.

"My ciagrette's gone out," he said, which could explain why he needed a light for so short a butt. After he got the light he looked me straight in the eye. "I need a dime," he said.

I was surprised—I had never met a beggar quite like him. I was about to reach into my pocket when I remembered I had nothing smaller than a one-dollar bill. His bright eyes saw the arrested movement of my hand, and I felt embarrassed at turning him down as if by afterthought.

"I'll have to get some change," I said, and went into a cigar store. He waited on the sidewalk until I came out with the change. There was something hypnotic about him, and I was puzzled that I was doing this, and that he should be asking for a dime. In New York in 1931 beggars asked for a nickel—usually for a "cuppa coffee," in spite of what the popular song said. When I came out, the hypnotism was still working and I found myself giving him not a dime but a quarter.

He was tall and had a thin, rather aquiline face, and he wore no hat, which was far less common then that it is now. He touched his head in a half salute, but the effect of respectful gratitude was dissipated when he simultaneously kicked one of his feet back and leaned forward.

"You're a real pal," he said, and walked away. The whole thing was over quickly, and I stood wondering why in the world I had given him more than he had asked for.

I saw him a few weeks later—striding along on the other side of lower Fifth Avenue, still without a hat. It was a warm spring afternoon. Unlike other beggars, he didn't give the impression of sizing up the passers-by, but when he stopped to speak to someone, the person accosted invariably put his hand in his pocket and gave him a coin. Jimmy the Priest—I didn't know his name at that time—would give his half salute and back kick, make off, and I'd lose sight of him. The person Jimmy accosted never looked especially prosperous, and I couldn't see what had made Jimmy single that person out. Most beggars walk slowly, with an eye out for cops, and when they failed to make a touch with one man they would try another, and another, in fairly rapid succession, so that they hardly made any progress along the street. Jimmy's headlong pace and abrupt stop was a far more effective technique and gave no warning. Perhaps this was the secret of his hypnotism.

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The next time he saw me first. He caught up with me, and I felt a touch on my arm and a voice saying, "How're you today?" I stopped when I saw who it was. "I haven't forgotten that two bits you gave me, pal," he said, with the same bright smile, and I noticed again that he was well-shaved and clean. "I'm not on the prowl—I've already promoted my stake for today. Sometime maybe *you* won't have it and I will."

He winked and slapped his hip pocket. His eyes left mine and the smile changed as a man stopped next to us. This one did need a shave and was not clean. In particular, his shoes, even for depression times, were appalling—it was hard to see what kept them on his feet.

"Hey there, Jimmy," the newcomer said, and looked me up and down quickly.

"Beat it, Gizzard," Jimmy said. "This man's a friend, so lay off." The man scurried away and Jimmy shook his head. "Don't have anything to do with him, pal. That one never eats except when they put him in the ward. Soon's he's promoted thirty cents for a bottle of red he goes and drinks it in a doorway and then starts mooching again. By midafternoon he's full and holes up somewhere. By midnight he's on the prowl again. Want a drink?" He looked up and down the street, and patted his pocket. "Sherry."

I shook my head. "I wouldn't want to meet that man—Gizzard, did you call him?—in a dark corner."

"He's safe," Jimmie said positively. "You could push him over with one finger—he's a bottle baby, and he don't carry a knife. Most bums don't. Well, maybe you're right about the sherry—it's bad for the nerves. Me, I haven't any—nerves, I mean. Well—*omnia bona bonis!*"

After this I began to notice beggars more critically. Jimmy belonged in a special category—the others were almost always dirty and unshaven, and they had a kind of furtive desperation. All they wanted was to collect enough nickels and pennies for the next bottle of red, or sherry. Some years later, when I had got to know Jimmy better, I asked Jimmy about the canned heat and rubbing alcohol that bums and drifters were supposed to drink.

"That was back in the Twenties," he said. "They all drink wine—the hard stuff if they can get it, but you can get crocked on sherry and it lasts longer. It's twenty percent and rotgut's about forty, but the hard stuff costs four times as much, so you're better off buying sherry, and they all know it."

"But you can still get a gallon of alcohol for about five dollars,"

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I said. "In spite of Repeal."

"Who the hell's got five bucks? It'd take at least that many days to mooch it, and as soon as a guy's got enough for a bottle of red he says why wait?" We were sitting on a bench in Stuyvesant Square, near where I lived. It was a hot afternoon in early September, and Jimmy had taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.

"How about you?" I asked. "Why don't you save up for a can of alcohol? You told me once that sherry was bad for the nerves."

"What's so different about me? I'm just like all the rest." He laughed and took a swig of his pint of sherry. He offered it to me, but I refused; I'd already had a taste and it was bad—sweet and medicinal.

"Go on. You're not like the others and you know it. I should think you could get a job, or at least go on Relief."

"Relief!" he said. "You'll never see any of *us* on Relief! I tried it once, and you know what happens? You go in the Men's Shelter and they try to find you a job digging sewers. Next time you're approached by a panhandler, tell him you'll get him on Relief and see what he does. He'll say they won't give him Relief for some fancy reason, and if you press him, he'll spreadeagle and scram."

"He'll what?"

Jim smiled and shook his head. "It's an old movie term, from the silent pictures. You know what a takum is?" I shook my head. "Well, you remember in the old Keystone comedies when the guy's telling what he'd like to do to the boss, and the boss walks in behind him, and the other guy puts his hand up alongside his mouth and points this way." Jimmie put his left hand beside his face and pointed beyond me with the forefinger of his right hand, which was also next to his face. "Remember?"

I nodded.

"Well, all those tricks were called takums. I'll show you the spreadeagle and scram. See, I'm a bum walking along. and when I get level with you, you call out: Hey, cheese it—the cops!"

He went off a short way, turned, then began to walk toward me with a slow, bouncy step, and when he was in front of me I called out my line. Immediately he jumped high in the air, throwing his arms up and out, and spreading his legs so that he formed a capital X. When he landed he began a kind of crazy run, his knees coming up high in front of him, his hands held out forward, moving alternately up and down as if they were chopping something. I recognized it at once—it brought back memories of Mack Sennett and actors like Ben Turpin.

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Jimmy came back and sat down. "I used to work as an extra for Keystone and sometimes Biograph. They had a studio on East Fourteenth, between Fifth and Union Square. North side. I met Mary Pickford once." He took out his pint bottle and shook it. It was nearly empty. "How about we finish this off?" When I said I didn't want any he added, "How're you fixed for some dough?"

"Come off it, Jimmy," I said. "You're not one of those guys that once he starts he can't stop, are you?"

"You hit the nail on the head, pal," he said cheerfully. *"Rem acutetigisti,* we used to say. Hey!" He shouted the latter to a man some distance away. "Hey, Roses! Come over here—I want you to meet someone."

The man turned and shuffled toward us. He looked like a typical bum except that he was much older than most—exposure, undernourishment, and continual drinking made them susceptible to disease, and most of them never reached old age.

"I want you to meet a pal of mine," Jimmy said to the old man. "Meet Roses," he said to me. "Roses, this is Steve."

The old man gave me a quick look and sat down on the other sidy of Jimmy. He had a white stubble of beard and his eyes were red-veined and watery. He leaned down and pulled the empty bottle from under the bench where Jimmy had put it, and made sure there wasn't even a drop left by upending it over his mouth. Then he tossed the bottle away.

"How much you got, Jimmy?" he said.

"I got twenty-seven. How about you?"

"Fifteen, and a Canadian dime. Charlie Finch'll be along soon, maybe he'll put in. How about you, Steve? Want to put in with us for a quart?"

"You leave him along," Jimmy said, and turned to me. "This Finch'll have around twenty cents. That'll be enough if we can pass the Canadian dime. Do you want to guarantee the Canadian dime?"

"What do you mean?"

"*You* could pass it easy, so would you like to give us a real U.S. dime for it?"

"Well—" I began, but Roses stirred uncomfortably and muttered something about it not being maybe a *Canadian* dime exactly.

"What do you mean, you old bum?" Jimmy said. "Here, let me see it!" Roses took a coin out of his pocket and handed it over. I could see it was a French twenty-centime piece. "Where'd you get this? This is no dime! You been hanging around the Brevoort? Frenchy'll break your damned neck if you try and muscle in on his customers."

Jimmy turned to me. "This

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Frenchy—maybe you've seen him? He hangs around in front of the Hotel Brevoort or the Lafayette and puts the touch on the people coming out in the evening. He does it in French, see? He picked up French when he was in the war, and he figures anybody eats at the Brevoort maybe speaks French, and they'll want to show it off. Psychology."

"Here comes Finch," Roses said, pointing up the path.

"Well, he'd better have his put-in," Jimmy said.

Roses got up and started to meet the oncoming Finch.

Jimmy leaned toward me. "Now *this* one you ought to keep away from after dark. He's a hard boy—he's done time for knife holdup. More than once." Roses came up with Finch, and Jimmy nodded to him. "What you got?" he asked him.

"I got twenty," Finch said, and took off his greasy Panama hat and fanned himself. He was as tall as Jimmy—six feet—with cheekbones and small sharp eyes. His look was unlike Jimmy's open direct look. I should explain that the latter was not one of innocence. It was frank, but intent and rather demanding in a man-to-man way, and I had finally come to recognize it as the source of Jimmy's hypnotism.

Jimmy introduced me to Finch, who gave me a quick once-over and sat down next to Roses. The three men took out their various sums of money, and Finch said, "How about him?"

"Want to change your mind, Steve?" Jimmy said, and I shook my head. "Okay, you're the boss. Well, we've got sixty-two unless somebody's holding out." He looked at Roses, who shook his head and raised his right hand.

"Okay," Finch said. "I'll get it."

"Like hell," Jimmy said. "You're all tuckered out." After a moment the others handed their contributions over to Jimmy who made a count and slipped the money into his pocket. Then he got up, half saluted, and gave the back kick. "I'll promote the extra thirteen cents, and we'll get the six-bit gin. Don't go away." He turned and made off toward Fifteenth Street.

"Don't go *away*!" Finch said. "More like go with him and see he don't get lost with our dough."

"He'll be back," Roses said.

There were a few minutes of silence and I tried to make conversation. "I hear Jimmy once studied for the priesthood."

"That's how come he knows all that Latin," Roses said. I was dubious about such studies being the origin of Jimmy's classical taglines, but they did indicate a more than elementary education.

"Did you know he'd been a movie extra back in the Twenties?" I asked, and they both nod-

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ded. "Wonder why he didn't stay with it?"

"Who wants to live in California?" Finch said. "You can't promote so much as a cup of java in Hollywood—no one'll stop to listen to your pitch. They're all too busy." He sneered.

"But if he had extra work he wouldn't need to—" I dropped the subject because they and I knew the answer to what I had in mind. There was silence again. Interchange between them seemed to be only by voluntary contribution and I had the impression that among panhandlers questions were unwelcome.

After further waiting I began to suspect that something was wrong, and I looked at Finch and Roses to see if they were getting impatient. They seemed to be completely at ease. When more than half an hour had passed—Jimmy could have dug up the extra thirteen cents in a matter of minutes—Finch said, "Well, let's finish this."

He pulled out a pint of sherry with only a few swallows left in it. I refused his offer of a share, and they drank it between them. I got up and said goodbye, leaving them on the bench . . .

I ran into Jimmy on a cold evening about a week later, on Broadway south of Herald Square. He stopped in his abrupt way and asked how I was fixed. I was in between jobs and flat broke, and told him so. "What did your pals Roses and Finch have to say about your going off with their money that way?" I asked him.

"I came back," he said "Later—and I had the sherry. It's only that I ran into a good streak of cash customers. Finch and Roses weren't worried."

"Sherry? I thought you were going to get the six-bit gin."

Jimmy wasn't in the least flustered. "That's right. Gin it was." He looked at me with fatherly concern, and pulled a fifth of rum out of his overcoat "So you're broke, are you? Take a pull of this—you got to watch out for these cold nights."

There were almost no people in sight, so I did what he said; but I felt foolish.

"Go on, take some more," he said; but undiluted rum is hard to take out of a bottle in public, and I said I'd had all I wanted. He took several swigs of it and put the bottle in his pocket.

"I'm off sherry for the nonce," he said, and made an exaggerated gesture, with head turned away and both hands held up, palms out. It was familiar and when I asked him if it was a takum, he grinned and said it was. "You got a place to sleep, Steve?" I nodded. "You *sure,* now?" he persisted. "Because if not, say so and I'll stake you to a flop."

I was astonished, and peered at him closely.

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"How come you tried to promote me just now," I asked, "if you've got all this dough?"

"Ha! I'm on a winning streak," he said, as if that explained everything. "Here, take this, damn it." He took three one-dollar bills out of his pocket and pushed them at me. Then he looked up and down the street, and back at me with the open direct look.

"There's a cop coming, so will you please *take* it?"

The hypnotism worked again, and I took the money, looking where he'd looked. Sure enough there was a cop coming toward us. "And this. I got to move, Steve. G'wan, will you?" He handed me the nearly full bottle of rum. "Cheese it—the cops!"

He jumped up, giving the spreadeagle and scram, and went ridiculously running down the street. I turned and started uptown, and about halfway along the block I saw two men on the other side of the street. They were Finch and Roses, and I wondered if it had been the cop that Jim wanted to avoid . . .

In a week the unseasonable cold snap was over, and it was summer again. I had been up all night on a job, and I went for a walk. Several blocks south of my apartment was Tompkins Square, with grass and trees in it, still green.

Near the north side two policemen were standing, looking at something at their feet, and I went over to see. Lying on his back in a flowerbed was Finch, his head bashed in. He had a knife in his left hand.

I knew one of the officers slightly, and he nodded to me.

"There won't be any prints on it," he said to the other officer, holding out a heavy stick of rough wood.

The other shook his head. "I don't know any drifter called Rip, do you?" he said.

"Whoever it was, Finch was going at him with his knife," the first cop replied. Next to the body, someone had spelled out RIP in the soft earth. "Okay, wait here while I go and turn in the report. But it's a waste of time. When these bums kill each other you never get to find out who did it."

He started away toward the street and I turned and walked down through the park.

Rip? *Requiescat in pace,* I thought.

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a *NEW* Schlock Homes adventure by

ROBERT L. FISH

"Really, Homes," Watney said shortly. "I fail to understand any of this. What is this business of the unmarried cook and the warm ale?"

But later—subsequent to The Great Detective's "brilliant analysis"—Watney cried: "Homes, you have done it again!"

Yes, indeed—another Homesdunit, with another inspired title . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE DOG IN THE KNIGHT

by ROBERT L. FISH

IN GLANCING THROUGH MY NOTEbook delineating the many odd adventures which I was fortunate enough to share with my good friend Mr. Schlock Homes in the early months of the year '68, I find it difficult to select any single one as being truly indicative of his profound ability to apply his personal type of analytical *Verwirrung* which, taken at its ebb, so often led him on to success.

There was, of course, the case of the nefarious card-cheat whom Homes so cleverly unmasked in a young men's health organization in the small village of Downtree in Harts—a case I find noted in my journal as *The Adventure of the Y-Bridge.* It is also true that during this period he was of particular assistance to the British Association of Morticians in a case whose details are buried somewhere in my files but which resulted, as I recall, in a National Day being set aside in their honor. While it remains a relatively unimportant matter, the tale still is recorded in my case-book as *The Boxing-Day Affair.*

However, in general those early months were fruitless, and it was not until the second quarter of

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the year that a case of truly significant merit drew his attention. In my entry for the period of 15/16 April, '68, I find the case listed as *The Adventure of the Dog in the Knight.*

It had been an unpleasantly damp day with a drizzle compounded by a miasmic fog that kept us sequestered in our quarters at 221-B Bagel Street; but evening brought relief in the form of a brisk breeze that quickly cleared the heavy air. "We have been in too long," Homes said, eyeing me queryingly. "I suggest a walk to clear away the cobwebs."

I was more than willing. Homes had spent his day at the laboratory bench, and between the stench of his chemicals and the acrid odor of his Pakistanis, the room fairly reeked. For several hours we roamed the by-ways of our beloved London, our coat-collars high against the evening chill, stopping on occasion at various pubs to ascertain the hour. It was eight o'clock exactly when we arrived back at our rooms, and it was to find a hansom cab standing at the kerb before our door.

"Ah," Homes observed, eyeing the conveyance sharply. "A visitor from Scotland Yard, I see!"

I was sufficiently conversant with Homes's methods by this time to readily follow his reasoning; for the crest of the Yard—three feet rampant on a field of corn—was emblazoned both on the door and the rear panel of the coach, clearly visible under the gas-lamp before our house, and the jehu sitting patiently on the box was both uniformed and helmeted. With some curiosity as to the reason for this late visit I followed Homes up the stairs and into our quarters.

A familiar figure rose from a chair beside the unlit fireplace and turned to face us. It was none other than Inspector Balustrade, an old antagonist whose overbearing manner and pompous posturing had long grated upon both Homes's nerves and my own. Before we could even discard our outer garments he was speaking in his usual truculent manner.

"My advice to you, Homes," he said a bit threateningly, "is to keep your hands off the Caudal Hall affair. We have an open-and-shut case, and any interference on your part can only cause the luckless miscreant unwarranted and futile hope. In fact," he continued, looking fiercer than ever, "I believe I shall go so far as to *demand* that you leave the matter alone!"

Schlock Homes was quite the wrong person to address in such words and tones. "Inspector Balustrade, do not rail at me!" said he, sharply. He doffed his coat and deerstalker, tossing them carelessly upon a chair, striding

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forward to face the Inspector. "I take those cases that interest me, and it is my decision alone that determines which they shall be."

"Ah!" Inspector Balustrade's tiny eyes lit up in self-congratulation. "I knew it—I knew it! I merely wished to confirm my suspicions. So they've been at you, eh? And, by the look of things, bought you! Lock, Stock, and Barrel!"

"Eh?"

"The lawyer chappies, that is," Balustrade continued. "Well, you're wasting your time listening to them, Mr. Homes. There is no doubt of the culprit's guilt." He smiled, a sneering smile. "Or do you honestly believe you have sufficient evidence to contradict that statement?"

"What I think is my affair," Homes said, eyeing the man distastefully. "You have delivered your message, Inspector, so I see little to be gained by your continued presence here."

"As you wish, Mr. Homes," Balustrade said with mock servility. He picked up his ulster, clamped his bowler firmly to his head, and moved to the door. "But Dr. Watney here can bear witness that I did my best to save you from making a fool of yourself!" And with a chuckle he disappeared down the stairs.

"Homes!" I said chidingly. "A new case and you did not inform me?"

"Believe me," he said sincerely, "I know nothing of this. I have no idea of what the Inspector was talking of." He contemplated me with a frown. "Is it possible, Watney, that we have inadvertently missed some item of importance in the morning journal?"

"It would be most unusual, Homes," I began, and then suddenly remembered something. "I do recall, now, Mrs. Essex borrowing the front page of the *Globe* to wrap some boots for the cobbler's boy to pick up, but if I'm not mistaken, the lad failed to appear. Let me get it and see if it can cast any light on this mystery."

I hurried into the scullery, returning in moments with the missing sheet. I spread it open upon the table, pressing out the creases, while Homes came to stand at my side.

"Ah!" said he, pointing triumphantly. "There it is!" He bent closer, reading the words half-aloud. *"Tragic Affair at Caudal Manor.* But where is the—? Ah, here it is, just beneath the headline." He smiled in satisfaction at his discovery, and read on:

" 'Late last evening an unfortunate incident occurred at Caudal Manor, the country estate in Kent of Sir Francis Gibbon, the 62-year-old Knight of the Realm. A small dinner party was in progress, at which the only guests

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were Sir Francis' sister-in-law, Mrs. Gabriel Gibbon, who is married to Sir Francis' younger and only brother and who has often acted as hostess for her bachelor brother-in-law; and a Mr. John Wain, a young visitor from the Colony of California, a chemist by trade, who is staying with Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Gibbon as a house-guest. Mr. Gabriel, two years younger than his illustrious brother, was absent, having claimed he preferred to see his romance at the theatre rather than at home, and for this reason was spending his evening at the latest Boucicault offering in Piccadilly. Readers of the society news may recall that the beauteous Mrs. Gibbon, like Mr. Wain, was also a colonial from California at the time of her marriage two years ago.

" 'The main course, chosen out of deference to their foreign guest, was frankfurters—called 'hot-dogs' abroad—which was also a favourite dish of his Lordship, Sir Francis. This course had already been consumed, washed down with ale, and a bitter-almond tart had also been eaten, when Sir Francis suddenly gasped, turned pale, and seemed to be having difficulty in his breathing and his speech; then, in a high nasal voice, he apologized to his guests for suffering from a stomach indisposition and stumbled out of the room. As quickly as the other two could finish their dessert, coffee, and brandy, and avail themselves of the fingerbowls, they hurried into the drawing-room to offer succor; but Sir Francis was sprawled on the rug in a comatose state and died before medical assistance could be summoned.

" 'Mrs. Gabriel Gibbon was extremely distraught, and exclaimed, "I didn't think my brother-in-law looked well for some time, and I often warned his that bolting down hot-dogs was bad for his heart condition, so I really cannot claim to be surprised by this sudden cardiac seizure, although I am, of course, quite heart-broken." Her physician was called and offered her a sedative, but Mrs. Gibbon bravely insisted upon completing her duties as hostess, even demonstrating sufficient control to supervise the maids in the clearing and thorough washing and drying of the dishes, as well as the incineration of all the left-overs.

" 'Students of Debrett will recall that the Gibbon family seat, Caudal Hall, was entailed for a period of ten generations by King George III, at the time the land, titles, and rights were bestowed on the first Gibbon to be knighted. The entailing of an estate, as we are sure our readers know, means that during this period the property must be passed on and cannot be sold or otherwise disposed

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of. With the death of Sir Francis, this condition has now ceased to be in effect, and Mr. Gabriel is now free to dispose of the estate as he chooses, or pass it on to his heirs in legal manner. Under the conditions of the original knighthood conferred on the first Gibbon, the title also continued for this period of ten generations, so Mr. Gabriel will only be entitled to be called Sir by his servants and those of his friends who dislike informality.' "

Homes paused a moment to remove a boot that blocked our vision of the balance of the article, and then leaned over further, staring in utter amazement at the portion of the column that had been revealed. In a startled tone of voice, he continued:

" 'STOP PRESS:- The police officials have just announced an arrest in the Caudal Hall affair, claiming that Sir Francis was the victim of none other than his guest, Mr. Wain, age 26, the American colonial. They point out that a chemist would have the necessary knowledge to administer a fatal potion in Sir Francis' food, and that despite the knight's known heart condition as testified to by his sister-in-law, they believe there is more to the matter than meets the eyes, and that the heart condition was at most only a contributory factor.

" 'They note that Mr. Wain is left-handed and sat on Sir Francis' right, permitting his operative hand to constantly hover over his Lordship's food. They believe he took advantage of the fortuitous circumstance of a bitter-almond tart being served to pour oil of nutmeg, a highly toxic abortifacient, either onto the tart itself, or more likely onto the 'hot-dog' itself, in a dosage sufficient to cause Sir Francis his severe abdominal pain, and eventually his death. The police base their conclusion on the faint odor of nutmeg they discerned upon the lips of the deceased, although they admit it was difficult to detect because of the almost overpowering odor of the bitter-almond tart.

" 'Whether Mr. Wain intended the dose to be fatal, the police say, is unimportant; he is nonetheless guilty of his victim's demise and shall pay the full penalty for his crime. They claim to have evidence that Mr. Wain is a revolutionary, propounding the theory that the American colonies are now independent, a viewpoint certain to have aroused the righteous wrath of so fine a patriot as Sir Francis Gibbon. Bad feelings could only have resulted, and it is the theory of the police that the dinner party developed into an argument which culminated in the tragic death of Sir Francis. Mrs. Gibbon's failure to remember any such quarrel is attributed to absent-mindedness, added to her concern over the

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success of the meal, which undoubtedly caused her to be inattentive. (Artist's sketches on Page 3).' "

"Fools!" Homes exclaimed in disgust, replacing the boot and rewrapping the package. "Balustrade is an idiot!" He flung himself into a chair, looking up at me broodingly. "We must help this poor fellow Wat, Wainey—I mean, Wain, Watney!"

"But, Womes—I mean Homes," I said remonstratingly, "it appears to me that they have a strong case against the young man. As a medical practitioner I admit that stomach pain is often found to be related to heart seizure, but still, one cannot rule out the possibility of other agencies."

"Nonsense!" said Homes half-angrily. "I can understand a young man's reason for harming a complete stranger, and I can even understand a chemist carrying about a vial of oil of nutmeg on the offhand chance he might meet someone to whom he wished to give stomach indisposition. But what I cannot lead myself to believe is that a University graduate would be so ill-informed as to honestly believe the American colonies are independent!" He shook his head. "No, no, Watney, it is here that the police case falls down!"

He tented his fingers, staring fiercely and unseeingly over them through half-lidded eyes, his long legs sprawled before him. Minutes passed while I quietly sat down, remaining silent, respecting his concentration; then, of a sudden, our reveries were interrupted by the sound of footsteps running lightly up the stairs, and a moment later the door burst open to reveal a lovely young girl in her mid-twenties. She might have been truly beautiful had it not been for the tears in her eyes and the tortured expression on her face. Scarcely pausing for breath, she hurried across the room and knelt at Homes's side, grasping his two hands in hers.

"Oh, Mr. Homes," she cried beseechingly, "only you can save John Wain! In the first place, the scandal would be ruinous were a house-guest of mine to be found guilty of a crime; and besides, it would play havoc with the entire scheme!"

"You are Mrs. Gabriel Gibbon?"

"Yes. I will pay—" She paused, thunderstruck. "But how could you have possibly known my identity?"

Homes waved the question aside with his accustomed modesty, preferring to return to the problem at hand. "Pray be seated," said he, and waited until she was ensconced across from him. "I have read the account in the journal and I am also convinced that the police have made a grave er-

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ror. Tell me," he continued, quite as if he were not changing the subject, "would I be correct in assuming that the cook at Caudal Manor is a fairly youngish woman? And unmarried, I should judge?"

"Indeed she is, but how you knew this I cannot imagine!"

"And did she recently have a quarrel with her fiancé ?"

The young lady could only nod her head in stunned fashion.

"And one final question," Homes went on, eyeing her steadily. "By any chance did Mr. Wain complain at table because his ale was not iced, as he was accustomed to drinking it?"

"He did, but—" The girl stopped speaking, coming to her feet and staring down at Homes almost in fear. "Mr. Homes, your ability is more than uncanny—it borders on the supernatural!" Her eyes were wide. "How could you possibly have known—?"

"There is nothing mystical in it," Homes assured her gravely. "In any event, you may return home with an untroubled mind. I assure you that Mr. Wain will join you—a free man—before many hours."

"I cannot thank you enough, Mr. Homes! Everything I have heard and read about you is the truth!" Her lovely eyes welled with tears of gratitude as she left the room.

"Really, Homes" I said shortly. "I fail to understand any of this. What is this business of the unmarried cook and the warm ale?"

"Later, Watney!" Homes said, and picked up his greatcoat and deerstalker. "At the moment I must go out and verify a few facts, and then see to it that poor Mr. Wain is freed. These colonials suffer sufficiently from a feeling of inferiority; incarceration can only serve to aggravate it."

It was well past midnight before I heard Homes's key in the door below, but I had remained awake, a warmed kippered toddy prepared against my friend's return, my curiosity also waiting to be assuaged. He clumped up the stairs wearily, doffed his coat and hat, and fell into a chair, accepting the toddy with a nod. Then, after quaffing a goodly portion, he put the glass aside, leaned forward, and burst into loud laughter.

"It would have done you good, Watney, to see Balustrade's stare when he was forced to unlock Wain's cell and usher the young man to the street," he said with a grin. "I swear for a moment there I thought the Inspector was going to physically engage me in fisticuffs!" He chuckled at the memory and finished his kippered toddy, visibly relaxing. "And thank you, by the way, for your thoughtfulness in preparing this toddy for me. It was delicious."

"You can demonstrate your

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gratitude in far better manner," I said, possibly a trifle tartly for it was well past my usual bedtime, "by explaining this entire, complex, incomprehensible case to me, for none of it makes the slightest sense!"

"No?" he asked incredulously. "I am rather surprised. I should have thought the medical evidence would have pointed you in the right direction. However," he continued, seeing the look on my face and, as ever, properly interpreting it, "let us begin at the beginning." He lit a Pakastani.

"First, as you well know, Watney, I respect you quite highly as a medical man, but I have also made a study in depth of toxicology. You may recall my monograph on the Buster Ketones and the Hal-loids which had such a profound effect on early Hollywood comedies—but I digress. To me the evidence presented by the article in the morning journal was quite conclusive."

His fine eyes studied my face, as if testing me. "Tell me, Watney, what precise toxicity results in the symptoms so accurately described by the writer in the journal?" He listed them on his fingers as he continued, "One: stomach disorder. Two: dimness of vision—for you will remember that Sir Francis stumbled as he left the room, and yet, after living in Caudal Manor for all his sixty-two years, one must assume he could normally have made his way about blindfolded. Three: difficulty in speaking and breathing. And four: a nasal quality to his voice."

Homes looked at me inquiringly. "Well?"

"Botulism!" I said instantly, now wide-awake.

"Exactly! True, the symptoms are similar for hydrocyanic poisoning, but with the knight consuming the frankfurter, botulism was clearly indicated. My questions to young Mrs. Gibbon regarding the ale and the cook merely confirmed it."

"I beg your pardon, Homes?" I asked, completely lost once again.

"Let us take the ale first," said he, his kindly glance forgiving my obtuseness. "Certainly Mrs. Gabriel Gibbon, herself a colonial, would be aware that icing of ale is almost compulsory in the colonies, and would therefore be expected by her compatriot. The failure to do so on the part of a dedicated hostess, therefore, could only have been caused by one thing—"

"The absent-mindedness which the reporter mentioned?" I asked, eager to be of help.

"No, Watney! *The lack of ice!* Now, in a household the size of Caudal Manor, who has the responsibility for seeing that the supply of ice is adequate? Naturally, the cook. But an elder-

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ly cook with years of experience would never forget a matter as important as ice, particularly with a foreign guest expected. Therefore, the conclusion is inevitable that the cook was not elderly, but rather, on the contrary, young. Still, even young cooks who manage to secure employment in an establishment as noted as Caudal Manor are not chosen unless they are well-qualified; therefore some problem must have been preying on the young cook's mind to make her forget the ice. Now, Watney, what problem could bother a young lady to this extent? Only one concerning a male friend; hence my conclusion that she had had a quarrel with her fiancé." He spread his hands.

"But, Homes," I asked, bewildered, "what made you think of ice in the first place? Or rather, the lack of it? Merely the floe of ideas?"

"The botulism, of course, Watney! Lack of proper refrigeration is one of the greatest causes for the rapid growth of the fatal bacteria, and both Mrs. Gibbon and her friend Mr. Wain may count themselves fortunate that the organism attacked only the one frankfurter, or they might well have both joined Sir Francis in death!"

For several moments I could only gaze at my friend Mr. Schlock Homes with the greatest admiration for his brilliant analysis and masterful deductions.

"Homes!" I cried. "You have done it again! Had it not been for your brilliant analysis and masterful deductions an innocent colonial might have gone to the gallows for a crime due, in its entirety, to a hot-dog in the knight!" Then I paused as another thought struck me. "But one thing, Homes," I added, puzzled. "What of the oil of nutmeg that the police made such a matter of?"

Homes chuckled. "Oh, that? That was the easiest part of the entire problem, Watney. I stopped at the mortuary while I was out to-night and had a look at Sir Francis' cadaver. As I had anticipated, he had taken up a new after-shave lotion with a nutmeg bouquet, and as soon as I can determine its name, I believe I shall purchase it as well."

Due to the late hour when we finally retired that night, it was well past noon when I arose and made my way to the breakfast table. Homes had not arrived as yet, but I had no more than seated myself and reached for my first spoonful of chutneyed curry when he came into the room.

He greeted me genially and seated himself, drawing his napkin into his lap. In deference to his habits I put aside my spoon for the moment and picked up the

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morning journal, preparing to leaf through it in search of some tidbit of news that might serve Homes as a means to ward off ennui. But I did not need to turn the page. There, staring at me from scare headlines, was an announcement that made me catch my breath.

"Homes!" I cried, shocked to the core. "A terrible thing has happened!"

He paused in the act of buttering a kipper. "Oh?"

"Yes," I said sadly. "Tragedy seems to have struck poor Mrs. Gibbon again!"

He eyed me sharply, his fish-knife poised. "You mean—?"

"Yes," I said unhappily, reading further into the article. "It seems that early this morning, while taking his constitutional along Edgeware Road, Gabriel Gibbon was struck and killed by a car recklessly driving on the wrong side of the road. The police surmise the culprit may have been from the Continent, where drivers are known to use the wrong side of the road; but this is mere theory and unsupported by fact, particularly since the driver escaped and the description by the few witnesses is considered useless."

"That poor girl!" said Homes, and sighed deeply.

"Yes," I agreed. "True, she will now inherit the Gibbon fortune, but this can scarcely compensate her for the loss of her loved one!"

"True," Homes said thoughtfully. Then a possible solution came to him and he nodded. "We can only hope that her friend Mr. Wain will stand by her in her hour of need, even as she stood by him in his! In fact, I believe he is enough in my debt for me to suggest it. A telegram form if you please, Watney—"

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THE DOLLAR CHASERS

by EARL DERR BIGGERS

(continued from page 47)

Bill Hammond was awakened the next morning by the noise of Mikklesen singing in the bath. The Englishman had a fair voice, through which at the moment rang a note of triumph natural to one who was securely locked in and had the plumbing all to himself.

"The same old story," Bill muttered, "Britannia rules the waves." He looked at his watch—8:30—high time to be up and doing.

If he knew Mikklesen, however, it would do him no good to hurry. He lay where he was, watching the fresh salt breeze flutter the curtain at his porthole. Outside was a clean blue world, an empty world. Restful, this cruising on one's yacht.

Something pleasant had happened—ah, yes, Sally. She loved him. Other things had happened, not so pleasant. That little luck piece he had sworn to find. Might be more of a job than it had looked last night in the moonlight with Sally by his side. Somebody had it; somebody who knew only too well its value and was guarding it against the time when it could be traded in for a goodly supply of its little playmates. Somebody—but who?

He thought of Henry Frost, with his foolish story of a collar shortage. He thought of O'Meara, falsifying with the ease that comes from long practise, on the quiet deck at half-past one in the morning. He thought of the man who had invaded his stateroom, fleeing with that dress shirt in his arms. Uncle George's studs were floating far, journeying to some romantic port. A South Sea Islander, no doubt, would wear them next—in his ears, or maybe his nose. What would Aunt Ella say?

Aunt Ella's reactions, however, were unimportant just now. He had agreed to assume the role of detective and his course was clear. He must discover the owner of that vanished shirt.

He rang for Tatu and while he waited, rattled at the door leading to the bath. Not that he expected to gain anything by it, but it relieved his feelings.

Tatu entered, minus his accustomed smile. The boy was worried; there could be no mistake about that.

"Very much trouble today," he

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announced. "Dollar gone. All Japanese boys catch hell. You want something, please?"

"How about taking back that shirt?" asked Bill, looking at him keenly.

"Yes-s," said Tatu. All expression left his face.

"Well, you can't. It was stolen from me in the night."

"Yes-s," said Tatu.

No surprise; no interest even. Did Tatu know all about the shirt, or was this just his Oriental stoicism? Bill stared at him, and Tatu stared back. And the Occidental felt suddenly hopeless and helpless.

"Look here, Tatu," he said, "this is very important. I want to know where you got that shirt."

Tatu looked at the berth, at the bathroom door, through the porthole, at the ceiling, then back to Bill. "Forget," he said.

"What? Say, don't try that on me!" Bill was annoyed. "Now we'll start all over again. Where did you get the shirt?"

"Forget," said Tatu.

A wonderful people, the Japanese. Bill Hammond managed to control himself.

"You told me a minute ago you would return it. How could you return it if you don't know where you got it?"

"Forget," said Tatu.

East is East and West is West. They stood facing each other, the Occidental glaring, the Oriental staring. Bill Hammond turned away. Never get anywhere by losing his temper. Patience, amiability might do the trick.

"All right, Tatu," said Bill. "You and I won't quarrel. You helped me out of a tight place last night and I appreciate it."

"Most welcome," Tatu assured him, busily brushing Bill's dinner coat.

An idea flashed into Bill's mind.

"I tell you, that fix I was in was no joke. And I understand I wasn't the only one in trouble. I hear that Mr. Frost came aboard with no extra collars." He paused. Tatu brushed industriously. "Yes, sir, I hear that when he came to dress he didn't have any more collars than a bathing suit."

Tatu laid down the coat.

"Mr. Frost have plenty collar," he said.

"Oh, he did?" Bill sought to appear casual. "I guess I didn't get it straight then. Well supplied with collars, was he?"

"Very big box. Maybe ten. Maybe twelve. Plenty."

"You don't say!"

"I lay him out. I know."

Bill turned away lest his face betray him. Here was news! Henry Frost's story disproved already. It certainly began to look as though this Hammond boy was a born detective.

"The morning is okay, Tatu,"

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he remarked, staring out the porthole. "When do we get to Monterey?"

"Maybe not go to Monterey," said Tatu. "Anything else, please?"

"Not go to Monterey? What are you talking about?"

"Things very bad this nice morning," answered Tatu. "Hear bell ringing. Yes-s. Thank you." And he bowed out.

Bill turned again to the bathroom, silent now. He rattled the knob, called, but there was no answer. Donning dressing gown and slippers he stepped out into the corridor, warm with honest anger. He knocked at Mikkelsen's door.

The Englishman opened it.

"Ah, good morning," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Bill was proud of himself. A grand thing, self-control.

"I believe," he said, "that you and I are supposed to share that bathroom fifty-fifty."

"Certainly, old chap," agreed Mikklesen. "Anytime you feel inclined."

The struggle this time was a bit more difficult, but again Bill won.

"Then will you please unlock the door?" he said through his teeth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Frightfully careless of me. Just a moment." And Mikklesen closed his door in Bill's face.

The reporter reentered his cabin and managed to spring into the bathroom before Mikklesen had regained his own quarters.

"I'd like to see you today sometime," he said to the Englishman.

"Really? I fancy we'll run into each other. Bound to on a yacht. I mean to say, rather close quarters."

"You never spoke a truer word. You know, I'm supposed to get an interview from you—for my paper."

"Fancy! You're a pressman then?"

"I work on a newspaper, if that's what you mean."

"Not really? It wouldn't be done in England, you know."

"What wouldn't be done?"

"I mean to say, inviting a pressman as a guest. How extraordinarily confusing!"

"Well, I'll give you time to get a grip on yourself before we start the interview," Bill answered. "And now, if you don't mind, even a pressman prefers to bathe in private."

Bills resentment was short-lived, and by the time he had finished shaving he had decided that maybe he wouldn't exterminate Mikklesen, after all. Perhaps the fellow served some useful purpose. Who could say? He whistled cheerfully as he dressed, though yesterday's shirt was nothing to whistle about.

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However, he had it on good authority that clothes don't make the man, and he sincerely trusted that all aboard had heard that one.

In the dining room he found Mrs. Keith and O'Meara breakfasting together. They appeared to be on excellent terms, and not particularly pleased at sight of Mr. Hammond's shining morning face.

"Good morning," said the reporter. "We seem to be rather late."

"Frightfully," admitted Mrs. Keith.

"Natural result of staying up half the night," went on Bill. "Late hours make late breakfasts, eh, O'Meara?"

"Was Mr. O'Meara up late?"

"I ran into him on deck at one thirty this morning," smiled Bill.

"Yes, and it's lucky you did," growled the lawyer. He turned to Mrs. Keith. "This kid had a funny dream about seeing somebody in his stateroom," he explained. "I had a terrible time quieting him and getting him back to bed."

Mrs. Keith smiled sweetly on Bill.

"So you have queer dreams," she cooed. "How thrilling! You must tell me all about them. By the way, I hope you play golf. I'm looking for someone to take me round the Del Monte links this morning."

"Look no further," Bill said.

"Oh, that's awfully good of you," Mrs. Keith smiled.

"I mean," Bill added hastily, "you're not going to Monterey."

"What's that?" O'Meara cried. "Where are we going?"

"Don't ask me," Bill answered. "All I know is, we'd have been at Monterey long ago if that had been our destination."

"But—I thought it was all settled," O'Meara objected.

Julian Hill came in. He was fresh as the morning in spotless linen. O'Meara at once applied to him for information.

"It's quite true," said Hill. "We're not bound for Monterey—or any other port. We're just cruising."

"Just cruising?" O'Meara repeated.

"Just wandering about the ocean," Hill went on, "playing for time."

"I don't get you," the politician said.

Hill smiled. "You know Jim Batchelor as well as I do. He's lost something—something of great importance—to him. And he's not the sort of man to land his servants and crew—and his guests—until he's been over each and every one with a vacuum cleaner. Yes," added Mr. Hill, looking hard at O'Meara, "I'd advise the man who has that dollar to hand it over. Or we may not get back to town this year."

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O'Meara stood up.

"It's an outrage!" he cried. "Oh, of course I know how Batchelor feels. But this isn't fair to those of us who happen not to be thieves." And he in turn looked hard at Julian Hill. "I've got to be back in town by Monday morning," he added.

"It's all very exciting, at any rate," purred Mrs. Keith. She, too, rose, and they went out together.

"It begins to look as though there might be an opening here for a first-class detective," Bill Hammond ventured.

"Not at all," Hill answered coldly. "Mr. Batchelor is quite competent to manage his own affairs." The rest was silence.

His breakfast over, Bill went in search of Sally. He found her in the dazzling sunlight on the afterdeck, and not minding it, hers being that sort of complexion.

"Hello," he said. "This is a surprise!"

"What are you talking about?" she wanted to know.

"When I'm away from you I keep thinking how lovely you are. Then I see you, and you're even lovelier than I thought. That's why I say—"

"Yes, but Bill, where in the world have you been?"

"Eating breakfast. Did you miss me?"

"I certainly did."

"Fine!"

"Are we in this detective business together, or are we not? I'm dying to know what you've found out."

He told her of his interview with Henry Frost and of his more recent discovery regarding the collars. A puzzled little frown wrinkled her otherwise perfect brow.

"I can't understand it," she protested. "Henry Frost is father's dearest friend."

"Always dangerous—dearest friends," Bill told her. "How is your father, by the way?"

"Worried to death. He claims he didn't sleep a wink, and I believe him. The first night without his luck piece in thirty-seven years. I told him you were on the job and all about the wonderful evidence you've run down in the course of newspaper work. I was quite eloquent, really."

"Good! I hope you'll always be eloquent when discussing me."

"I always shall, I'm sure."

"You darling! Go on, expand that idea, please."

She seemed about to obey, but at that moment Jim Batchelor joined them.

He appeared nervous and upset.

"Good morning, Hammond," he said. "Sally's told me that you're willing to help in this unfortunate affair."

"Well, if it's not presumptuous of me—"

"Nonsense! You've had more experience in this sort of thing

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than I have, and I'll be glad of your assistance. Besides"—he glanced about him—"it's rather a hard thing to say about one's guests; but—well, I trust you, my boy." The emphasis on the "you" was marked.

"That's very kind of you, sir. May I ask what steps you have taken in the matter?"

"The servants and the crew have all been questioned. They've been carefully searched, and their quarters too. I may say that I don't suspect any of them. Sometime during the day guests' cabins and luggage will be —er — examined. I'm hospitality itself, but this is a vital business for me and I'll stop at nothing. I've given orders to the captain not to put in anywhere. There are supplies aboard to carry us for five days, and I'll stay out that long if I have to."

"It's a good idea, sir," Bill agreed.

"I've also just posted a notice offering a reward of three thousand dollars for the immediate return of my luck piece, and no questions asked. 'Immediate' is the important word there. The money's yours if you run down the thief."

"Oh, but I wouldn't take your—money, sir," Bill said. The emphasis on the "money" was not so marked as he had intended.

"Rot! Why not? I'd be getting off cheaply at that. Three thousand is a small price to pay for the peace of mind the return of that dollar would bring me. My boy, I'll never know a happy moment until I get it back."

"Bill, why don't you tell him?" Sally suggested.

"Tell me what?" Jim Batchelor asked quickly.

"Bill's unearthed the most amazing things, Dad. You'll never believe—"

"Good lord, why keep me in the dark?" He was all excitement. "What's up?"

"If you don't mind, sir," Bill said, "I'd like just a little more time before I let you in on it. You see—"

"Well—if you say so. But only a little time. Don't keep me waiting."

"I'll make it snappy, sir," said Bill, and hurried off.

Tatu, making up the berth in Henry Frost's cabin, informed him that Frost had slept late and was now at breakfast.

Bill looked round inquiringly. "How about the collars, Tatu?"

"Him lock collars in suitcase," Tatu explained. "Put key in pocket."

Smiling to himself, Bill went to the dining room, where his employer sat alone at his breakfast.

"Good morning, sir," said Bill.

"Good morning. You breakfast late." Frost's tone implied that it was a bad sign.

"I've had my breakfast, Mr.

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Frost. I want to speak to you, if you don't mind."

"And if I do mind?"

"I'll have to speak anyhow," said Bill firmly. Henry Frost looked up sourly from his grapefruit.

"I'll say this for you: You're the most offensive man on my payroll."

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm only trying to do the right thing."

"People who are only trying to do the right thing generally make fools of themselves. What is it now?"

"Last night I told you I didn't intend to go to Mr. Batchelor with certain information I had picked up. I've been forced to change my mine."

"Really? What forced you?"

"That story of yours about the collars. I've found out it wasn't true."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. You say you went to Jim Batchelor's room for a collar. I say that's a typographical error. You went there for a dollar."

Henry Frost rose and tossed down his napkin.

"Will you come with me?" he said.

"Certainly, sir." Bill followed his employer on deck. "This is all very painful for me, Mr. Frost."

"Yes, more so than you think. Do you happen to know where Jim Batchelor is?"

"He's on the afterdeck."

Henry Frost turned in that direction.

"Regarding that interview with Mikklesen, you needn't trouble. You're not on the paper any more."

"Just as you say, sir," Bill replied smilingly.

But his heart sank. In love and out of work—a great combination.

Jim Batchelor was waiting with Sally where Bill had left them. He looked up eagerly as the two men approached.

"Jim, I've got something to say to you," began Frost.

"All right. What is it?"

"This young idiot thinks I took your dollar."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Batchelor, disappointed in Bill. "I know you wouldn't take it."

"Well," continued Mr. Frost, "I—I—" His face turned scarlet. "As a matter of fact, Jim—I did."

Jim Batchelor leaped from his chair.

"What's that? Say that again!"

"Now, Jim, don't get excited. I give you my word, it was all a joke."

"A joke! You old simpleton! Getting funny at your age! Well, hand it over!"

"I want you to understand how it was," Frost continued. "I was determined to take you out and

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trim you at golf today. Last night somebody happened to say something about your losing that dollar, and it came over me all at once that if you did you'd be so upset you'd be easy picking on the golf course. So just for fun, Jim—that was all—I slipped into your room and substituted that other dollar."

"You're a criminal at heart, Henry. I always knew it. But where in Sam Hill—"

"Of course I never dreamed you'd take it so seriously. And I want to talk to you about that. Really, Jim, that dollar's become an obsession with you. No man ought to build his whole life on a thing like that. It's wrong—all wrong. Let this be a lesson to you."

"Will you cut out the sermon and give me the dollar?"

"I'll get it. It's in my room. There's no hard feelings, Jim—"

"There will be if you don't shut up and get that dollar."

Frost departed. Jim Batchelor stalked the deck. He was mad and he showed it.

"The old idiot!" he stormed. "What's got into him? Second childhood, I call it. A joke! You heard him—he said it was a joke!"

"Never mind, Dad, it's all right now," said Sally soothingly. "And you must remember, it was Bill here solved the mystery."

"Mighty clever of him too. I'll write him a check in a minute."

"Oh, I couldn't allow that, sir," Bill protested. "Not under the circumstances."

"Rot! Just as serious as a real theft. And for that matter—who knows? The old fox! I never did trust him."

"Dad! Your best friend!" Sally was shocked.

"Well, how do I know what he's up to?"

At that moment Mr. Frost reappeared. For once his famous poker face failed him.

"Jim," he said, "I feel like a fool."

"You're certainly acting like one. Where's my dollar?"

Frost slowly extended his bony hand. Eagerly Jim Batchelor reached out a hand to receive. Into it Henry Frost dropped—a bit of paper, a greenback, the promise of the United States Government to pay one dollar on demand.

"What the devil's this?" roared Batchelor.

"I found it in the place where I'd hidden your dollar, Jim," said Henry Frost humbly.

Jim Batchelor did not speak. He threw the paper dollar to the deck. His face purpled, so that Bill Hammond wondered what one did first in case of apoplexy.

"What can I say, Jim?" Frost pleaded. "I wouldn't have had this happen for a cool million."

"Apologies!" gurgled Batchelor.

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"Regrets! What do I care for them? I want my dollar!"

"It was all a joke," said Frost — an unfortunate remark.

"Yeah, a joke! Ha-ha! Fine joke! Somebody else thought so too. Somebody decided to steal your stuff. And now where are we? Just where we started!"

"With this difference," said Frost. "I'm in on this now. You and I will run the thief down together. I've something at stake, too, and my first move will be to add a couple of thousand to that reward you offered."

"A lot of good that will do," shrugged Batchelor. "If three thousand wouldn't bring it, five won't either. I tell you, we're up against it." He turned suddenly to Bill. "You—you haven't any other clue, have you?" he asked. The trustful note in his voice was pathetic. It made two young people very happy.

"Well, I have one," Bill admitted.

"You have?" Batchelor brightened at once.

"Yes; it may not be very important. But I'll work on it. I'd like your permission to do whatever I think necessary—to search other people's staterooms if I think best."

"Go as far as you like." Batchelor turned to Frost. "This boy's promised to help me."

"Oh, he's a wonder!" sneered Frost.

"You bet he is," Batchelor answered. "He ran you down in record time, and I'll back him to get the other thief."

"Dad!" Sally reproved.

"All right, Jim," said Frost. "I've get it coming to me."

"I'll say you have!"

Bill bent over and picked up the greenback from the deck.

"I'll take charge of this, if you don't mind. And by the way, Mr. Frost, did anybody else aboard know you took that dollar?"

"Yes—come to think of it," said Frost. "It seemed best, in case my motives should be misunderstood, to let a second party in on the—er— the joke. So I told Julian Hill."

"When did you tell him?"

"Last evening—before I took it. And afterward I mentioned to him that I had it in my stateroom."

In the silence that followed, Bill had a vision of the night before—two tables of bridge, with Julian Hill wandering alone somewhere outside.

"By the way," said Batchelor, "this may not mean anything; but I heard this morning that Mrs. Keith lunched last Wednesday at the Palace with Blake. The Blakes are old rivals of mine," he explained to Bill, "and they've never made any secret of their interest in that dollar."

"And who told you about Mrs. Keith, sir?"

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"Julian Hill."

"Ah, yes," Bill smiled. "Well, I'll do my best."

"I'm sure you will, my boy," said Batchelor. "Don't forget, there's five thousand in it for you now."

"I hope there's more than that," thought Bill.

He smiled at Sally and moved away. Frost called after him.

"By the way, Hammond," he said, "if you get the time you'd better do that Mikklesen story. Simon Porter will be expecting it."

"Thank you, sir," Bill answered. Sally joined him and they went forward along the rail.

"What did he mean, Bill?" she asked.

"Oh, he was just handing me back my job. You see, he fired me a little while ago. Now he loves me again. And speaking of that, where do you stand this morning?"

"Just where I stood last night," she told him.

"The day of miracles arrived last night," he said. "You can sit down now, my dear—if you'll tell me all about it."

"All about what?" They found a couple of deck chairs.

"About how you—like me pretty well."

"Never mind that. You tell me. You love me, don't you, Bill?"

"Sally, words are inadequate! I gave 'em a chance last night, and they fell down on the job."

"When did you start, Bill—being fond, I mean?"

"That day you were helping orphans. The moment I saw you—honest, Sally, I loved you on the spot. And for ten minutes I madly worshiped you. Then somebody told me your name. So I went away and never loved you again."

"Bill!"

"Well, that was the idea. Only it didn't work out very well."

"I'm glad it didn't. But business before pleasure, Bill. What's your other clue?"

His bright look faded.

"It isn't any good," he said. "I thought for a minute there might be something in it. I see now I was wrong."

"But what is it, Bill?"

"It's a shirt."

"A shirt?"

"Yes, we've run the collars to earth, and now we'll get busy on the shirt. I tell you, Sally, this is beginning to look to me like the annual outing of the Laundrymen's Benevolent Society."

"You interest me strangely. What's it all about?"

He told her. The misadventure in the steamy laundry of Honolulu Sam, his agony when he found himself shirtless, Tatu's prompt rescue, the theft in the night, Tatu's reticence on the morning after—all these he detailed at length.

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"The trouble with the detective game," said Sally, when he had finished, "is that it's so full of mystery. Whose shirt do you imagine that was?"

"Well, there's Julian Hill. He appears to have an extensive wardrobe."

"Bill, you don't think that Julian—"

"I don't know—just a guess. My job now is to get hold of Tatu and pry the information out of him."

"Japanese are difficult," said Sally.

"You bet they are, and this boy is Gibraltar's little brother. But I'll make him open up."

"I'm sure you will."

"I'll get the facts out of him if I have to strangle him," Bill told her, "just to prove to you how tenderly I love you."

But Bill Hammond's optimistic prediction failed to come true. He did not get the facts from Tatu. After fifteen minutes of the third degree, the little Japanese still stood firm as Gibraltar — maybe firmer. Bill cajoled, pleaded, threatened. Tatu looked at him with all the calm mystery of the Orient in his eyes, and suavely protested that he had forgotten just where he acquired that shirt. The luncheon bugle came as a merciful interruption.

"All right, go along," said Bill. His efforts had wilted him. "But I'm not through with you, my lad."

"Yes-s, thank you," answered Tatu, and had the audacity to smile as he went out.

Near the door of the dining room Sally was eagerly waiting.

"Well?" she asked.

"Salute your hero," said Bill. "He's just been licked by a Japanese."

"Tatu wouldn't tell you?"

"Adamant, that boy. He's never heard the word, but he can act it out."

"Why not set Father on him?"

"No," protested Bill, "let's keep Father out of it. I've got to do this alone. You know why."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Just what a regular detective would do," he told her. "Wait for a lucky break."

"Is that the way they work?" she asked, unbelieving. She was all for action—her father's daughter.

"It certainly is," said Bill. "I read an interview once with a great French detective. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, as I didn't know then that I was going into the business. But I remember one thing—he said that the detective's chief ally was luck."

"But suppose you're not lucky?"

"Something that happened last night," smiled Bill, "proved I'm

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the luckiest man in the world."

Jim Batchelor came up.

"What's doing?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I'm working." Bill tried to make it sound businesslike.

"Results—that's what we want," Batchelor reminded him.

"You bet we do," said Bill, and they went in to lunch.

At the table there was little of the cheery animation of the night before. The guests ate in preoccupied silence, and Jim Batchelor's intimation that they might wander about the Pacific for several days added nothing to the general gayety.

After lunch Bill Hammond saw Mikklesen enter the smoking room and followed. He sat down opposite the Englishman and offered him a cigar.

Mikklesen took it suspiciously and lighted it in the same spirit. Although it was a perfectly good cigar his subsequent expression seemed to indicate that his worst fears were realized.

"If you've no objection," Bill said, "we might as well get that interview over with."

"As you wish," Mikklesen agreed. "Where's your notebook?"

"My what? Say, it's only in plays that reporters carry those things."

"But I shouldn't care to be misquoted," the Englishman objected.

"Not a chance. I've got a mind like a phonograph record."

"Ah—er—what shall I talk about?" Mikklesen asked.

"Give me something snappy," Bill suggested. "Something they can hang a headline on."

"Oh, but that's hardly my style. Very bad taste, sensationalism. We have practically none of it at home. If you don't mind, I'd like to talk about India."

Mikklesen told his story. Beyond question he had the gift of speech, and Bill Hammond reflected as he listened that he was getting something. By an adroit question now and then, he led the talker on. Some ten minutes had passed when suddenly the second officer of the *Francesca*, who had charge of the yacht's wireless, entered.

"Mr. Hammond," he said. "a message for you."

"Oh, thanks," said Bill. The officer handed it over and departed. "Pardon me just a second."

"Certainly," agreed Mikklesen.

Bill opened the folded paper and read what the second officer had set down. As he read, he smiled happily to himself. The message was from Simon Porter.

"Never mind interview," Simon had wirelessed. "Have investigated by cable. A little black sheep who's gone astray. Kicked out of the English colony in Yokohama because they didn't like his shirts."

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His shirts! Oh, lady luck!

"Anything important?" inquired Mikklesen

"Not at all," said Bill. "Go on, please. You were saying—"

Mikklesen went on, but Bill no longer listened. The interview was cold, but the quest of the dollar was warming up. His shirts! They didn't like his shirts. Well, that might mean much or little; but Mikklesen's shirts certainly must be looked into.

"I fancy that's about all I can give you," said the Englishman finally.

"That's plenty," Bill answered heartily. He stood up. "You know, considering how fond you are of the Orient, I'm surprised you came away."

Mikklesen regarded him with a sudden interest.

"Pater's getting old," he explained. "Cabled me to come home. Couldn't very well refuse—family ties and all that. But sooner or later I shall return to the East."

"I'm sure you will," said Bill. "Thanks a lot."

Eagerly he hurried below. Things were certainly looking brighter. Midway down the passageway he encountered Tatu.

"I want you," he cried, and seizing the Japanese by the arm escorted him energetically into the cabin.

"What now, please?" inquired Tatu.

Bill pointed an accusing finger.

"That was Mikklesen's shirt," he announced.

"Somebody tell," said Tatu, with obvious relief.

"Yes, somebody's told. That lets you out. Now come across with the whole story."

"Nothing to say," Tatu replied. "I see he have two dress shirt. You have no dress shirt. I hear him talk unkind remarks about Japanese people. I take shirt. Why not?"

"It was a noble impulse. But why the dickens wouldn't you tell me this before?"

"Last night, maybe twelve o'clock, Mr. Mikklesen ring," Tatu explained. "Tell me I take shirt, give to you. I say no, indeed. He say very well, but will give me fifty dollar I not tell to you whose shirt you have. I accept with pleasure." His face clouded. "Japanese boy lose fifty dollar," he added.

"Has he given it to you?"

"Give one dollar for a beginning. Very small beginning."

Bill's eyes narrowed.

"Let me see the dollar," he demanded. Tatu handed over a crisp new greenback. "You're sure this is the one?"

"Yes-s. Only dollar in pocket," said the Japanese.

Bill took out a silver dollar, glanced at it, and handed it to Tatu.

"I'll trade with you, if you don't

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mind. Now listen, my lad! From now on you and I are friends."

"Yes-s. Very nice," agreed Tatu.

"You stick to me. I'm helping Mr. Batchelor—he's asked me to. No more secrets with Mikklesen. Otherwise trouble for you—much trouble."

"I know."

"The first thing in order is an examination of Mikklesen's remaining shirt."

"Can't do," Tatu said. "Shirt locked up."

"I suppose so," Bill replied. "However, I'm going to take a look. Go and see if there's anyone in Mikklesen's cabin."

Tatu departed through the bath. In a second he was back.

"Empty," he announced.

"Fine," said Bill. He stationed Tatu in the corridor with orders to signal if the Englishman appeared. Then, with the bath offering a way of eseape, he examined the room with care. But Mikklesen had left no dress shirt where eager hands could find it. Undoubtedly it was in the one piece of luggage that was securely locked—a huge battered bag that had a London lock.

"Nothing doing," said Bill finally. He returned to his own cabin, followed by Tatu.

"You want bag open?" inquired Tatu.

"It would be a good idea," Bill admitted.

"Maybe dollar inside," suggested the boy.

"It might be."

"Pretty strong lock," mused Tatu.

"Oh, so you noticed that?" Bill stared at the impassive face. "Well," he continued, thinking aloud, "my chance will come. It's bound to. Mikklesen's got to wear that shirt tonight, and perhaps—Oh, good lord—"

"Yes-s," said Tatu.

"Look here, my boy, what do I wear tonight? I'm worse off than I was last night. I haven't even got any studs."

"Excuse, please. Hear bell ringing," lied Tatu, and departed in great haste.

Bill Hammond sat down on his berth to consider developments. So it was Mikklesen's shirt he had worn so jauntily the evening before. Then it must have been Mikklesen who came in the night to reclaim his property. Knowing himself closely pursued, he had not dared turn into his own cabin, once he reached the corridor, and for the same reason he had thrown the shirt overboard. But why all this fuss about a dress shirt? And how, Bill asked himself, was it connected with Jim Batchelor's dollar, as he was sure now it must be. Well, detectives certainly earned their pay.

Bill left the cabin and returned to the upper deck. The *Francesca* appeared to be deserted. He

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dropped into a chair that stood invitingly in a shady spot and began to consider his problem. Must get into that bag of Mikklesen's. But how?

Heavy footsteps sounded on the deck and O'Meara passed by. He did not speak or turn his head. He appeared worried. Bill Hammond began to worry too. Was he wasting time on a false trail? O'Meara, Julian Hill, Mrs. Keith—all possibilities. Ought to be looking them up a bit too.

But no. For the present he would follow that shirt, see where it led. He'd get into Mikklesen's bag. How would a regular detective go about it? Break open the lock perhaps? No, too crude. Find out where Mikklesen kept his keys? Much better. Find out—how?

It was a rather drowsy afternoon, and a full twenty minutes passed before Bill had an idea. He rose at once to try it out. When he reached the door of the smoking room Mikklesen was just leaving.

"Hello," Bill said. "I've been thinking about that story of ours. We really need a few photographs to dress it up."

"Oh, no, old chap," said Mikklesen hastily. "I shouldn't care for that at all."

"I don't mean pictures of you," Bill explained. "Just some snapshots taken in the Orient. You surely have some of those."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have," admitted Mikklesen. "I'll give them to you later."

"But if you don't mind"—Bill summoned his most winning smile—"I'm at work on the story now."

For a moment Mikklesen stood regarding him.

"Oh, very well," he said, "come along."

He led the way below and Bill followed close, determined to miss nothing now. When they reached the Englishman's cabin Mikklesen took a bunch of keys from his pocket. Bill Hammond tried not to look too interested.

"I keep my bag locked," Mikklesen explained. "Things disappearing right and left, you know."

"It's the only safe thing to do," Bill agreed.

The Englishman bent over his bag.

"Look there!" he cried.

Bill looked. The lock on Mikklesen's bag had been smashed open.

"How beastly annoying!" The Englishman's face was crimson with anger. "This is too much, really it is. I understood I was to go on a cruise with gentlefolk, not with a band of thieves." He was hurriedly investigating the contents of the bag.

"Anything missing?" Bill asked.

"There doesn't appear to be," said Mikklesen, cooling off a bit. "But whether there is or not I

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shall certainly complain to our host." He took out an envelope and glanced into it. "The photos, old chap. Pick out what you want and return the rest, if you will."

"Surely," Bill agreed. He waited hopefully. "If you'd like me to stay here and keep an eye on things while you look up Mr. Batchelor—"

Mikklesen stared at him. Did he imagine it, or was that the ghost of a smile about the Englishman's lips?

"Thank you so much," he said. "But I shall ask Mr. Batchelor to come to me here. I won't leave my cabin again this afternoon—if you're interested."

If you're interested! Now what did he mean by that? Did he know that Bill was on to him, or was it a shot in the dark?

"Oh—er—of course—" said Bill lamely, and departed.

Back in his own room, Bill tried to think things out. What did "if you're interested" mean? And who had broken the lock on that bag? Evidently Mikklesen wasn't the only shady character aboard.

He took out a book and settled down in his berth to read, his ear attuned to eventualities in the next cabin. Would Mikklesen keep his word and remain on guard by his mysterious shirt? An hour passed, and it began to appear that such was the Englishman's intention.

It was, as has been noted, a drowsy afternoon. Bill dropped his book and lay back on the pillow. Ah, this was the life! No harsh call from Simon Porter sending him out on a bit of legwork on the hard pavements. No feverish hurry to make the last edition. Nothing but the soft swish of water, the thump of the engines—sounds that suggested slumber. Bill accepted the suggestion . . .

He was awakened sometime later by a sharp knock on his door. Leaping up, he opened it. A servant stood outside.

"Mr. Hammond, you're wanted above sir."

Wanted! What now? Some new development in the matter of the dollar, no doubt. He hastily brushed his hair and went to the upper deck. At the top of the companionway he encountered Aunt Dora, looking extremely competent.

"Ah, Mr. Hammond," she said, "I hope I haven't disturbed you. We've a table for bridge and we lack a fourth."

Trapped! Bill looked wildly to the right and left.

"I—I thought it was something important," he stammered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean—you don't want me. I'm a terrible player—as you have reason to know."

"Practice makes perfect. I'll give you a few pointers."

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"It's awfully good of you, but—I'm very busy and —my eyes aren't in very good shape."

"I noticed your failing eyesight," she answered, "last night when you trumped my ace of spades. However, we'll put the table in a strong light. Come along."

"I—I'll be very happy to," said Bill, surrendering.

Aunt Dora didn't care whether he was happy or not. She had him. He wasn't her ideal bridge player, but he was all she could get. And as Bill followed her into the main lounge he prayed to see Sally there.

But he didn't. Julian Hill and Henry Frost sat glumly at a table, their manner that of captive slaves on Caesar's chariot wheels. Aunt Dora sat down and the game was on. It proved a long and painful session. At the close of each hand Aunt Dora halted the proceedings while she delved into the immediate past, pointing out to one and all the errors of their ways. Bill got a lot of undesirable publicity out of these little talks.

The dinner hour was not far away when Sally came in and released him. When they left the lounge Aunt Dora was going strong. Mr. William Hammond, it seemed, had done something for which he should have been drawn and quartered.

"She'll never forgive me," said Bill. "I got her signals mixed."

"I'm afraid she's rather tiresome at times," Sally smiled.

"Well, she will insist on crossing her bridge after she's got well over it. There are people like that."

"You were good to play, Bill," Sally said.

"Yes, but I didn't play so good, and I wasted a lot of time when I should have been sleuthing."

"Has anything happened?" she inquired.

"I should say it has. It was a big afternoon up to the moment I met your aunt." He told her of Simon's cable and the accident to Mikklesen's bag. "Things are moving," he added.

"They seem to be," she admitted. "What are you going to do now?"

"Ah—er—something very bright, you may be sure. I'm keen-eyed and alert. My brain is hitting on all twelve."

"Yes, but what are you going to do?"

"My dear, don't be so literal. Can it be you don't trust me?"

"Oh, I know you're simply wonderful. Only—"

"Never mind the only. We're on the verge of big things. Watch and wait!"

His manner was confident, but by the time he had reached his cabin his confidence had begun to wane. He stood for a moment wondering just what his preparations for dinner were to be. No

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evening clothes tonight, that was certain. He would have to make some sort of apology to Jim Batchelor and let it go at that. At any rate, he had appeared properly clad the night before, and the other guests could draw their own conclusions regarding his appearance tonight.

He tried the door into the bath—locked, of course. He rattled and called—there was no sound within. Have to go and open the door again. As he paused outside Mikklesen's cabin something told him not to knock. He entered very quietly.

The cabin was empty and in semidarkness. He moved farther into the room—and his heart stood still. A white blur in the dusk—Mikklesen's dress shirt! It was lying on the settee under the porthole, within easy reach.

He put his hand down and touched it, and as he did so a faint sound in the bath startled him. He drew his hand back from the shirt, but in that brief second he had made an interesting discovery. Mikklesen appeared in the bathroom door.

"Good lord!" he cried. "You gave me a shock! What are you doing here? Confound it all, is there no privacy aboard this yacht?"

"I'm sorry," said Bill. "I didn't know you were in the bath, and I was coming through to unlock it. I thought you'd gone off and left it that way—it wouldn't be the first time, you know."

"Well, I happen to be using it," said Mikklesen testily, and the fact that half his face was lathered and he carried a razor seemed to bear him out. "In the future, I'll thank you to knock before entering my cabin."

Bill considered. He had Mikklesen where he wanted him, but his sense of the dramatic told him to bide his time. Better an unmasking in Jim Batchelor's presence than a scene with only two people in a half-dark cabin.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Sorry I disturbed you."

"It's rather upsetting," complained Mikklesen. "First my bag broken into and then you popping up like a ghost." He followed Bill to the door and shut it after him in a manner suggesting extreme annoyance.

Out in the corridor Bill gave himself up to a moment of unalloyed joy. It was almost too good to be true. Too easy. A bright lad, this Mikklesen; but not too bright for young Mr. Hammond, the peerless detective. For Bill knew where the dollar was now!

He must have a word with Jim Batchelor before he staged his big scene. He tiptoed down the passage and knocked at the multimillionaire's door. Batchelor called an invitation to enter, and when he did so he was glad to

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find that Sally also was in the room. She was tying Batchelor's dress tie, for she was a faithful daughter and didn't like Tatu's work as a valet. Her father broke from her ministrations at sight of Bill.

"Something doing?" he inquired, with pathetic eagerness.

"I'll say there is," replied Mr. Hammond cheerily.

"You've got it?"

"I've got it located—same thing."

"Not quite." Batchelor's happy look faded. "However, where is it?"

"That'll be revealed at the proper moment," Bill told him. "I just dropped in to prepare you for a little scene after dinner tonight. Sally, I'm glad you're here. After the coffee you're to take your aunt and Mrs. Keith from the dining room and leave us men alone."

"What—and miss the excitement? Not much!"

"Sally, you heard what Mr. Hammond said," reproved her father. "Obey."

"But, Dad—"

"Sally!"

"Oh, well, if you think Mr. Hammond knows best," smiled Sally.

"I'm sure he does."

"I'm sorry, Sally," Bill said. "But the subsequent events will be such that I don't think it the place for the so-called weaker sex. Mr. Batchelor, I want you to back me up from that point on. Anything I say—and anything I propose to do."

"Of course. But you might give me a little hint—"

"I will, sir." He handed over Simon Porter's wireless message. "Read that, please."

Batchelor read.

"Who's he talking about? Not — Mikklesen!"

"Yes, sir, Mikklesen."

"Good lord! I never thought of him. What about his shirts?"

"You wouldn't believe if I told you, sir. I'll show you after dinner."

"Fine!" Batchelor's spirits rose. "I'll be mighty glad to get this thing solved tonight. The captain's just told me there's something wrong with the engines, and we're circling back to Monterey."

He submitted while Sally put the finishing touch on his tie.

"By the way, Mikklesen called me into his stateroom this afternoon and put up a terrible howl because his bag had been broken into. I was very sympathetic. I didn't tell him the captain was the guilty party."

"Oh, the captain broke that lock."

"Yes; pretty crude work. He swore he could pick it open with a jackknife, but his hand slipped and he ended by smashing it. I didn't approve of his going quite that far."

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"Did he find anything?" asked Bill.

"Nothing. He went over the thing carefully—so he claims."

"He didn't have the combination," smiled Bill. "By the way, sir, I won't dress for dinner tonight. I'll come as a plain clothesman, if you don't mind."

"Come in your pajamas if you want to," said Batchelor. "Only get me that dollar."

"I'll get it," Bill assured him. As he left the cabin he smiled triumphantly at Sally and Sally smiled back.

The conquering hero—that was how he felt.

A tense air hung over the dinner table that evening, as though all present knew that some important development in the dollar chase was close at hand. Only one guest was entirely at ease—Mikklesen. He resumed his tale of far corners and strange adventures, and once more Bill Hammond had to admit that Mikklesen was good.

When the women had left, a pointed silence fell. Jim Batchelor sat for a moment staring at the end of his cigar.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I know you'll pardon my mentioning again the matter of the missing dollar, for I'm sure you're all as interested as I am to see the property recovered. Mr. Hammond has been making an investigation, at my request, and I understand he has something to report."

They turned with interest to Mr. Hammond. Bill smiled cheerily.

"We've made several discoveries," he began. "For instance, we know that the dollar was taken from Mr. Batchelor in the first place as a rather ill-advised joke." Frost squirmed in his chair, but Bill mentioned no names. He told how the unfortunate jokester, on seeking to return the dollar to its owner, had found in the hiding place a greenback of equal value. He took the bank note from his pocket.

"This is a brand-new note," he said, "and its serial number is 2B7654328B. Some of you may have noticed that when you are paid money by a bank, and receive new bills, the serial numbers usually follow in perfect sequence." He removed another bill from his pocket. "I have here," he added, "another new dollar, and the serial number is 2B7654329B. Is it too much to suppose that the two notes came from the same pocket?"

"Good work!" remarked Batchelor, beaming. "Where'd you get that other one?"

"The second note," Bill explained, "was given to Tatu, the valet, in return for some trifling service. It was given to him by one of you gentlemen here present." He paused. No one

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spoke. "It was given him by Mr. Mikklesen," Bill added.

They all turned and looked at the Englishman. His nonchalance was admirable.

"That may be true," he smiled, "I may have given him that note—I don't recall. What of it?"

"Pretty flimsy, if you ask me," said O'Meara. "I'm a lawyer and I want to tell you, young man—"

"Just a moment, Mr. O'Meara," Bill smiled. "We don't need a lawyer just yet. I recognized that this evidence is rather inconclusive. I mentioned it merely because it makes a good prelude to what will follow. The close relationship of these notes points to Mikklesen. Other things point to Mikklesen. I point to Mikklesen. I ask him to stand up and be searched—that is, of course, if Mr. Batchelor has no objection."

Batchelor nodded. "Go to it," he said heartily.

"Fine!" Bill said. "Now, Mr. Mikklesen, if you'll be so good—"

Mikklesen flushed.

"This is an insult," he protested. "Mr. Batchelor, I appeal to you. The simplest laws of hospitality—"

"You've abused my hospitality, sir," said Batchelor. "I know all about you. Stand up!"

Slowly the Englishman got to his feet.

"The coat, please," Bill Hammond ordered. "Thanks. Now the collar and tie. I'll help you, if you don't mind." He rapidly unfastened the studs in Mikklesen's gleaming bosom. "Our friend here," he explained, "has made a close study of his profession. He has perfected the Mikklesen shirt, for which he was famous in the Orient. The bosom is unusually stiff; it holds its shape well. And at the bottom, on the left side, an extra strip of linen makes a convenient pocket. You wouldn't notice it if the shirt were freshly laundered—I didn't"—he smiled at Mikklesen—"but after prying it open you have a handy receptacle for carrying slender booty—banknotes, or even a silver dollar. And the loot doesn't show, particularly if you are built concavely."

Bill removed from the bosom of the shirt a silver dollar and tossed it to Jim Batchelor. His heart was thumping; this was his big hour. "Your luck piece, I believe, sir," he said.

Batchelor's eyes shone.

"My boy, how can I ever thank you—" he began. With trembling hand he picked up the dollar. A hoarse cry of rage escaped him. He threw the dollar back on to the table and got to his feet. "Damn it," he cried, "how long is this thing going to keep up?"

"Wha-what thing, sir?"

"That," roared Batchelor, "is not my dollar! It was coined in the year 1899."

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"Good lord!" cried Bill; and glancing at Mikklesen he saw on that gentleman's face a look of undisguised surprise.

The room was in an uproar, everybody talking at once. But above the clamor Batchelor's voice rang out. He was facing Bill, and he was talking to Bill.

"You a detective! You're a defective, that's what you are! You get my hopes up, and then you—you—"

"I'm sorry, sir," poor Bill said. He was a bit dazed.

"Sorry! What kind of talk is that? Sorry! I could—I'd like to—I tell you this, you unearth more dollars for me, and I'll skin you alive!" He turned to Mikklesen, who was tying his necktie as best he could without a mirror. "And you, sir! What have you to say? What explanation have you to offer? Honest men don't go about with trick shirts. I know your reputation in the Orient. How come that dollar was where it was?"

"I'm afraid I've been done, sir," said Mikklesen suavely, putting on his coat.

"Done? How so?"

"Under the circumstances I can't do better than tell you the truth. If you will pause to consider, there has been no real theft. In each case, nothing but substitution—one dollar for another. The value of your luck piece is purely sentimental. Remember that, if you will."

"Go on," said Batchelor.

"I went to your cabin last night to get that dollar. I'm a bit of a jokester myself. I heard Mr. Frost at the door and had just time to reach the closet. From there I watched him make the substitution. I followed him, and when he left his cabin to go to dinner I slipped in. After locating your dollar I made a little substitution of my own. I had your dollar last night, I had it this morning—right where our young friend here found this other one. I put the shirt with the dollar in it in my bag and securely fastened the lock. Mr. Hammond here will bear me out when I say that sometime in the early afternoon the lock of my bag was broken. That must have been when the dollars were exchanged."

"Nonsense!" answered Batchelor. "You mean to say you haven't made sure of that dollar since?"

"I felt that there was still a dollar in the bosom of the shirt and naturally supposed it was the—er—luck piece."

Jim Batchelor slowly shook his head.

"I don't get you," he said. "You're too deep for me. However, I know one thing—you're not the sort of guest I care to have around. Something has happened to the engines and we're turning

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back to Monterey. In the morning you will greatly oblige me by taking your luggage and going ashore."

"Oh, naturally," Mikklesen agreed calmly.

"After you've been searched," Batchelor added. "Shall we join the ladies?"

As they left the dining room, Bill Hammond saw O'Meara seize Mikklesen's arm and hold him back. The politician's ruddy face was a study in various emotions, none pleasant.

Entering the main lounge last, Bill encountered Sally just inside the door. Her eyes were shining with excitement as she maneuvered him outside.

"Oh, Bill, I felt dreadfully," she said. "I mean, to miss your big scene of triumph."

"Ha-ha," he remarked mirthlessly.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Some triumph, Sally! A dud! As a detective I'm a great reporter." And he told her what had happened.

"What did Father say?" she inquired when he had finished.

"Ah," he answered, "you go right to the heart of the matter. Father said plenty, and if a look ever meant poison in the coffee, his look meant that to me. I tell you, Sally, it's all over now. As far as Father goes, I'm out."

"Don't give up," she urged. "Haven't you any more clues?"

"Well," he replied slowly, "a little one."

"I knew it!" she cried. "What is it, Bill?"

"Oh, nothing much. But I happened to pick up that dollar we found on Mikklesen, and—"

Jim Batchelor and Henry Frost emerged from the lounge and came up.

"Ah," said Frost sarcastically, "the young detective."

"Don't kid him, Henry," said Batchelor. "The boy's got a future. He can dig up more dollars than John D. Rockefeller."

"Mr. Batchelor, I certainly regret—" Bill began.

"Never mind that. Where are we now? Things are more confused than ever."

"If you'll take a suggestion from me," Frost began, "how about your captain? He opened Mikklesen's bag. Was he alone at the time?"

"Nonsense!" Batchelor answered, "You're wrong as usual, Henry."

"Well, I don't know. What's all this about the engines and turning back?"

"Rot, I say! The captain's been with me for more than ten years." Batchelor shook his head. "I tell you, I'm up a tree. A lot of things I don't understand. Very strange, for example, that Mikklesen should have made that confession. He could have denied everything and let it go at that."

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"Dad," said Sally, "Bill's got another clue."

"I suppose so," her father replied. "He certainly is a marvel for clues. I shouldn't be surprised if he conjured a dollar out of somebody's ear next. But it won't be my dollar, I'm sure of that."

"If you'll give me another chance, sir," suggested Bill.

"Well, you're a broken reed, but you're all I've got to lean on. What is it now?"

"Mikklesen's luggage was broken into about two-thirty. He didn't discover it until after three. The captain couldn't have been in there more than ten or fifteen minutes. What happened in the interval between the time the captain went out and Mikklesen came in?"

"Tell me that and I'll say you're good."

"I can only surmise, sir. But that 1899 dollar we found on Mikklesen—I know who had it last."

"What? You do?"

"Yes. That's the dollar I gave Tatu this morning in exchange for the greenback he got from Mikklesen."

"Tatu! That's an idea! Come into the smoking room and we'll have Tatu on the carpet."

The owner of the *Francesca* led the way, and Frost, Hammond, and Sally followed. Tatu, summoned, appeared a bit lacking in his accustomed calm. He feared his employer, and showed it.

"You've seen this dollar before, Tatu," said Bill, holding it out. "I gave it to you this morning. What did you do with it after that?"

Tatu stared at the silver dollar.

"Give him back," he said.

"Back to whom?"

"Mr. Mikklesen."

"The truth, Tatu," Batchelor demanded.

"So help," answered the Japanese. "Mr. Mikklesen say I do not keep promise. That not true. Make me give dollar back."

That was Tatu's story and he stuck to it. After a few moments of further questioning, Batchelor let him go.

"Well, where does that get us?" he wanted to know.

"Tatu's lying," declared Frost.

"I don't think so," Bill objected. "No, something tells me he speaks true. Mr. Batchelor, that big confession scene of Mikklesen's was staged with a purpose."

"What purpose?"

"To lull our suspicions once and for all. I've a hunch he's still got your dollar."

"Where?"

"That's for me to find out, sir." Bill was again the man of action. "Sally, I wish you'd go in and lure Mikklesen into a bridge game. After that's under way I'll act."

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"You sound good," admitted Batchelor. "But then you always do. I wish I could be sure you'd get the right dollar this time."

"I'll get it," said Bill. His heart sank. He'd said that before—with what result? But this time he must make good—he must! However, he wasn't so sure.

When he saw the Englishman uncomfortably settled as Aunt Dora's partner in a game, he hurried below. Without hesitation he turned on the light in Mikkelsen's cabin and began to search. He did a thorough job—under the carpet, in the closet, everywhere. But he found no dollar. Nothing at all of interest, in fact, save a little coil of flat wire which lay on the floor almost under the berth. It seemed of no importance, but he put it in his pocketbook.

His heart was heavy as he turned out the light and started to leave via the bath. He had one foot in the bathroom and the other in Mikklesen's cabin when the door into the corridor opened.

"Hello," said a voice—O'Meara's—very softly.

Bill fled. He silently took the key out of the door leading from the bath into his room, and, safe in his cabin, fastened the lock from that side. He laid his hand gently on the knob of the door and waited. Footsteps sounded faintly in the bathroom and then the knob began to turn slowly in his hand. He let it turn. A gentle shake of the knob, and then the footsteps receded. As soon as he dared, Bill unlocked the door and opened it an inch or two. He made out the occasional glimmer of a flashlight in Mikklesen's cabin.

For a time O'Meara searched industriously. Suddenly the flash went dark. Someone else had entered Mikklesen's cabin. Who? In a moment the politician enlightened him.

"Mrs. Keith!" he said in a low voice.

"Mr. O'Meara!" came the woman's answer.

"What can I do for you?" O'Meara inquired sarcastically.

"Is this your cabin, Mr. O'Meara?" she asked, equally sarcastic.

"It is not."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Just what you're doing. Looking for that dollar."

"Why, Mr. O'Meara—"

"Cut it out. I was on to you early in the game. See here, our interests are the same. Let's work together."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do. You're here to get that luck piece for the Blakes; and I—well, I represent other interests; interests that want to keep Jim Batchelor out of the primaries. Let me have that dollar until next Wednesday at six P.M. and you can have it after that."

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"But I haven't got it, Mr. O'Meara."

"I know you haven't. I mean, in case we can get hold of it."

"You think it's in this room?"

"I think Mikklesen's got it somewhere. You know, I had my deal all fixed with him. I caught him last night throwing a shirt overboard, and after a little talk he admitted he had the luck piece and agreed to deliver it to me in Monterey for twelve hundred cash."

"I thought of making him an offer myself," said the woman. "I knew his talents of old, and I was sure he had it."

"It's just as well you didn't. This morning, when Batchelor offered that whale of a reward, the dirty crook began to hedge. He'd have double-crossed me then and there, only I threatened to have him arrested before he could get out of the state. So he held off."

"Then that performance tonight was all staged?"

"It sure was," O'Meara said. "I could see it in his eye. It was all for my benefit. I wouldn't be surprised if he led that young fool of a Hammond right into it. He wanted me to think he'd lost the dollar. Probably he's figuring on getting ashore with it, and then sending it to Batchelor by a messenger. But only over my dead body. Let's get busy."

"Where does this door lead?" asked Mrs. Keith.

"Into a bathroom. There's a door into another cabin, but it's locked."

And it was, for Bill Hammond took the hint just in time. He went to the upper deck and left them to search, confident that it would have no results.

The bridge game was just breaking up, with enthusiastic cooperation of everyone save Aunt Dora. Bill took Sally aside, but before he could say anything her father joined them.

"Anything doing?" he inquired.

Bill told them of the conversation in Mikklesen's cabin. Jim Batchelor was indignant.

"Fine business!" he said. "O'Meara, and the woman too! I knew blamed well I couldn't trust anybody on this boat. Well, they'll go ashore, bag and baggage, with Mikklesen in the morning. But not until I've been over all three of them personally."

"Father!"

"Yes, I mean it. Well, Hammond, where are we now? Mikklesen's still got the dollar, you think? But where's he got it?"

"Well—" began Bill.

"You've got a clue, of course."

"Not one," Bill answered sadly.

"What?" Batchelor stood up. "Well, if you've run out of clues, then the skies are dark indeed. Something tells me I'll never see my dollar again. You may be a good newspaper man, my boy, but as a detective—well—oh,

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what's the use? I'm going to bed. Good night."

Sally and Bill followed him outside. In a shadowy spot on the deck they paused.

"Oh, Bill, what are we going to do now?" the girl sighed.

"Well, I have one—one little clue. But it's so silly I didn't have the nerve to tell him about it. Just a little coil of wire I found in Mikklesen's cabin."

"What would that mean, Bill?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to think tonight as I never thought before. I can't lose you, Sally. I won't—that's all."

"Not if I have anything to say about it, Bill, you won't," she answered, and the wisdom of stopping in a shadow became at once apparent . . .

In his berth Bill settled down to do the promised thinking. He began to go over in his mind, carefully, every point in the possessions of a man like Mikklesen. But somewhere in the neighborhood of the military brushes he fell asleep . . .

There is a subconscious self that never sleeps, but applies itself to any problem in hand. Which probably explains why Bill awoke the next morning with the hunch of his life. It was very late; and struck by an unaccustomed quiet, he looked out the porthole. The little town of Monterey and the green forest of Del Monte met his gaze, and he knew the *Francesca* had reached port.

The bathroom door was unlocked, and the door leading into Mikklesen's cabin stood open. There was no trace of the Englishman, nor of his many pieces of luggage. Alarmed, Bill rang for Tatu; but from him he learned that no one had yet gone ashore.

"Hurry," Bill ordered, "and tell Mr. Batchelor not to land anyone until he hears from me." And he prepared himself for a busy morning.

Jim Batchelor arrived just as Bill was putting on his necktie.

"Any news?" inquired the young man.

"Not a glimmer," answered Batchelor. He sat down on the berth, his gloomy face in striking contrast to the sunny morning. "The second officer was in Mikklesen's cabin while he dressed and examined everything he put on. We've been through his luggage again too. But there was nothing doing. Either he hasn't got that dollar or he's too smart for us."

"Where is he now?" Bill asked.

"He's on deck, waiting to go ashore. The launch is ready. O'Meara and Mrs. Keith are there too."

"Did you search them?"

"Well, no. There are limits. Besides, I'm sure they're just as much in the dark as I am. Both of them came to me this morning

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and said they wanted to leave the cruise here, so I simply told them to go. There seemed no occasion for a row."

"You were quite right, sir," Bill agreed.

"You—you sent me word not to let anybody land until you came up," said Batchelor.

"I did," Bill smiled.

"Are you—are you on a new trail?"

"I think so."

"My boy! No, no, I mustn't let you get my hopes up again."

"You're very wise sir," Bill admitted. "This isn't much—a fighting chance, that's all."

"Well, let's fight it," said Batchelor as they left the cabin. "I tell you again, you get that dollar back and there'll be nothing too good for you."

"Careful!" said Bill under his breath, and they went on deck.

Sally joined them, as lovely as the California morning, but with a worried look in her eyes. Bill smiled his reassurance. They moved along the deck and came upon Mikklesen, O'Meara, and Mrs. Keith sitting amid their luggage.

"We're losing some of our guests," said Batchelor.

"So I see," Bill answered. "I'd steeled myself to part with Mikklesen, but these others—I'm awfully sorry—"

O'Meara glared at him. Henry Frost, alert for news, came up.

"Mr. Batchelor," Bill went on, "before Mikklesen goes out of our lives forever, I'd like to ask him one question."

"Certainly. Go to it."

"Mr. Mikklesen"—the Englishman stood up, and he and Bill faced each other—"Mr. Mikklesen," Bill repeated, "what time is it?"

The Englishman's eyes narrowed.

"I don't understand."

"The time—by that watch of yours. I've seen you consult it before. Why not now?"

"My dear fellow"—Mikklesen was quite at ease—"it's a frightfully old thing, really. Belonged to my grandfather. Something has happened to it. It's not running."

"Not running? That's too bad." Bill held out his hand. "Let me have a look at it. I might be able to fix it."

Mikklesen's eyes turned quickly to right and left. He appeared to be measuring the distance between the *Francesca* and the shore.

"Come on," said Bill. "There's no way out. Hand it over."

"Why not?" said Mikklesen. He took from his pocket a large ancient timepiece and unfastened it from the chain. He was smiling. Bill's heart sank—was he wrong, after all?

His strong fingers closed eagerly on Mikklesen's watch. Anxiously he opened the back. The thing was packed with tissue

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paper. He lifted out the paper—and smiled, for underneath lay a silver dollar.

"I hope it's the right one this time," he said, and handed it to Batchelor.

"By the Lord Harry!" cried Batchelor. "My luck piece! The first dollar I ever earned. Little secret mark and all. My boy—my boy, I take back all I said."

Bill glanced at Sally; her eyes were shining. He handed the watch back to Mikklesen.

"When you took out the works," he said, "you shouldn't have let the mainspring get away from you. Lively little things, mainsprings. Elusive, what?"

"I fancy so." Mikklesen, still smiling, still nonchalant, restored the watch to his pocket. "Mr. Batchelor, I'll toddle along. There's been no actual theft."

"Who says there hasn't?"

O'Meara, purple with rage, was on his feet. "Batchelor, you turn this crook over to me. I'll put him behind bars, where he belongs."

Jim Batchelor shook his head. "Your passion for justice is splendid, O'Meara," he said, "but I prefer it otherwise. Publicity never did appeal to me. Mr. Mikklesen, I congratulate you. You must have been a wonder at hide and seek when you were a kid. You may as well—go along."

"Thanks, awfully," said Mikklesen. "It's been a frightfully jolly cruise, and all that." He glanced at O'Meara, and his smile faded. "I'm going to ask one last favor, if I may."

"Well, you've got your nerve," Batchelor said. "What is it?"

"Will you be so good as to send me ashore alone, and let the launch return for—these others?"

The owner of the *Francesca* was in high good humor. He laughed.

"Of course I will," he replied. "I can't say I blame you either. It isn't always safe for birds of a feather to flock together. Get into the launch. And you, O'Meara"—he put himself in the angry politician's path—"you stay where you are."

Mikklesen indicated his luggage to a sailor and hastily descended the ladder. The launch putt-putted away. O'Meara moved to the rail and shook a heavy fist.

"I'll get you," he cried, "you lowdown crook!"

Mikklesen stood in the stern of the launch and waved a jaunty farewell. He was off in search of new fields and better luck.

"Oh, Mr. Batchelor," purred Mrs. Keith, "it's a woman's privilege to change her mind, you know. If you have no objection I'll stay with the party."

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Batchelor. "I've got my dollar and I intend to hang on to it."

"Why, what do you mean?" she

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said, staring at him with wide innocent eyes.

"I'm on to you—and O'Meara too. I'm sorry you've forced me to say it. Go back to your friends the Blakes, Mrs. Keith, and tell them they've got me to lick on that India contract—if they can. As for you, O'Meara, my name will be entered in the primaries next week. And I'm glad to know where you stand."

"What's it all about?" O'Meara inquired blandly.

"You know very well what it's about. The second officer has some errands in the town, but he'll be back with the launch in an hour or so. When he comes I'll ask you both to leave the *Francesca.*" Batchelor turned and his eyes lighted on Bill Hammond. Smiling, he put his arm about Bill's shoulder. "Some detective, if you ask me. Come into the lounge, son. There's a little matter of business between us. Henry, you're in on this. Got your checkbook?"

"I've got it," said Frost, and he and Sally followed the pair into the main lounge.

"Two thousand from you, Henry," Batchelor reminded him.

"I know it." Mr. Frost reluctantly sat down at a desk.

"Wait a minute," Bill interposed. "I don't want any money, Mr. Frost."

"What do you want?" asked Frost.

"A better job."

"And he deserves it too," said Batchelor.

"Well," began Frost, whose first instinct was always to hedge, "I don't like to interfere at the office—" Still, his expression seemed to say two thousand is two thousand.

"The Sunday editor quit last week," Bill went on. "A word from you and the job's mine."

Frost stood up. "All right," he agreed. "We'll consider the matter settled." He patted his checkbook lovingly and departed.

"Now that was sensible," beamed Jim Batchelor. "A job—a chance to make good. Better than money."

"It looks better to me," smiled Bill. "You see, I'm thinking of getting married."

Batchelor got up and seized his hand.

"Fine! Fine!" he cried. "My boy, I wish you all the luck in the world."

"Then you approve of it?"

"The best thing that could happen to any young man. A balance wheel, an incentive."

"That's the way I feel, sir," said Bill heartily.

"And it does you credit." Batchelor sat at the desk. "My little check will come in the way of a wedding present." He stopped. "I hope you're getting the right sort of girl?"

"I'm sure of that, sir."

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"Of course you feel that way. But these modern girls—not the kind I used to know. Flighty, extravagant—they don't know the value of a dollar."

"This one," said Bill, "knows the value of a dollar. At least, she ought to."

"What's that?" cried Batchelor.

"Put away your checkbook, sir," said Bill. "It isn't your money I want."

Batchelor threw down his pen. "I—I didn't dream—Sally, what about this?"

She came and sat on his knee.

"Dad, you've never refused me anything yet. You're not going to haggle over a little thing like Bill."

"But—but I don't—this young man—why, he hasn't anything!"

"What did you have when you were married?" she asked.

"I had my brains and a strong right arm."

"So has Bill," she told him.

He turned slowly and looked at Bill. "I like you, my boy—I won't deny it. But a girl like Sally—it isn't so much the initial expense—it's the upkeep. Could you manage it?"

"With your permission," said Bill, "I'd like to try."

Batchelor kissed his daughter and stood up.

"You'll have to give me time on this," he said. "All so sudden. I'll think it over."

"Yes, sir," Bill answered. "And in the meantime—"

"In the meantime—" Batchelor stopped at the door. He looked at Bill Hammond long and wistfully. "You know," he said, "I'd give a million dollars to be where you are now." And he left.

"Poor Dad," said Sally. "Isn't he a darling?"

"It runs in your family," Bill told her. "I've noticed that."

"Bill, you'll always love me, won't you?"

"Love you—and keep you close," said Bill. "In the big moments of my life you'll give me courage to go on. The first wife I ever earned."

"Bill, be careful!" she said. "Somebody might come in."

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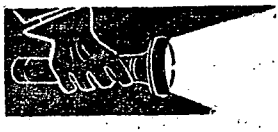

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Yes, it was bound to happen. Your mentor, that cynical old so-and-so, should have known better than to voice glowing hopes for 1970; this month almost inevitably finds us with only one first-class new mystery in sight.

So cashiered, busted a prophet should do some penance for his rashness. What penance, though? To wear sackcloth and ashes would be classically appropriate but impractical. If I called at *EQMM's* office in any such ill-chosen costume, they would probably throw me out as a freak.

And yet all is not lost. Despite that solitary hardcover, there are rescuing cavalry trumpets from three paperbacks: one new spy thriller and two fact-crime items in reprint. Let these make the old man's penance less severe.

In *Puppet on a Chain,* by Alistair MacLean (Doubleday, $5.95), even the puppets have murderous intent. Each of Mr. MacLean's books, whether of wartime or of peacetime riot, has contained some element of mystery. Here mystery is as important as violence, with ingenious narcotics-pushing whose agents can't be traced. Any reader disposed to regard narcotics-pushing as a theme too bewhiskered should see how it can be done when it's done as it ought to be.

Major Paul Sherman, one of the British heads of Interpol, has been urgently summoned to Amsterdam by his most trusted contact in Holland. Landing at Schiphol with two female assistants, beautiful dark-haired Maggie and beautiful blonde Belinda, Sherman expects anything except to see his contact shot down in the airport before they can meet.

Thenceforward, against grotesque backgrounds from night club to church to sinister warehouse (even that luxury hotel is sinister), the pace erupts with a gun-fight at the docks, a night chase over the Zuider Zee, and a final confrontation in the sky. Sherman himself strews the path with corpses before he sees the truth at a haymakers' dance and expounds it just in time. Experienced readers should spot the central villain, partly from one broad clue which Sherman does not even mention in summing up. To call this a brilliant book is only to stress the fact that its author has played fair.

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With *The Dragon's Eye,* by Scott C. S. Stone (Fawcett, 60¢) it's spies and action, action and still more spies. Michael Hawkins—no secret agent; formerly a working newsman in the Far East—has retired to Hawaii on his modest savings, seeking peace and quiet. But Hawkins's friend Leslie Trent, British secret agent as well as newsman, uses a kind of mental judo to pry him loose.

From behind the Bamboo Curtain, then, they will rescue Malcolm Leigh, once a Chicom sympathizer deep in Maoist counsels, who now wants no more of it and must be smuggled out to tell what he knows. But Leigh won't trust anybody except Hawkins, and won't move anywhere unless they also rescue his Chinese mistress, Choy-lin.

Beginning with near-disaster in Hong Kong, the two adventurers encounter dirty work aplenty before they meet Leigh and Choy-lin. Then it's more ground to cover, more enemies to dodge, in a spectacular race that never slackens until the burst of gunplay at the finale. Civilized reading, worth your time and attention.

Passing from fiction to fact, in Arthur H. Lewis's *Lament for the Molly Maguires* (Pocket Books, 95¢) we have the most balanced, authoritative account of terror and murder waged by one branch of an Irish secret society in the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania during the eighteen seventies, ending only when a Pinkerton detective infiltrated their ranks and broke their power. On these facts Conan Doyle based his Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Valley of Fear;* interpretation of the facts can still spark controversy almost a century later.

"Hostilities between the Molly Maguires and the (mine) owners," writes Mr. Lewis, "were not battle between capital and labor . . . In vain have Molly apologists tried to intertwine their protagonists and the labor movement: The facts do not bear this out."

Nothing extenuating, nor setting down aught in malice, the author avoids mere sensationalism as such; the story itself is sensational enough to have no need of colors more lurid. His whole chronicle, sombre and powerful, will hold you until the end.

For those wanting to learn how secret agents behave in real life, as opposed to how they behave in cloud-cuckooland, *The Spies,* edited by Robert G. Deisdorfer (Fawcett, 75¢) provides thirteen cases (count 'em, thirteen) of the real thing. Here are cloak-and-dagger deeds by friend, by enemy, and by the uncommitted, in two world wars as well as various cold wars and one war beyond our scope: the six-day affair of Arab-Israeli. From debunked Mata Hari to swaggering Che Guevara it's strong stuff, highly recommended. And yet in my heart, *mea maxima culpa,* I still prefer cloud-cuckooland.

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a *NEW* crime-detective story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Surely "the eternal triangle" has been used innumerable times as the basic plot situation of crime-detective stories. Man, wife, and "another woman" or "another man"—put the three together and so often they spell "murder." The theme has indeed been overworked, made hackneyed. But—and it's a big "but." If a writer can come up with a new twist, a new wrinkle, then the theme is new all over again. And that is what Mr. Twohy has done—come up with a "different" angle of "the eternal triangle" . . .

GOODBYE TO FRANCIE

by ROBERT TWOHY

FRANCIE WOULD LIKE A PICTURE of him, with a dashing little beard, to put on the mantel in her apartment—with an inscription: *All love to Francie from John.* John Wendle smiled.

He said at dinner to Leona, his leathery, rawboned wife, "I've been thinking of growing a beard."

She squinted her small, pale blue eyes and considered him. "Turn your head. Hmm. Yes, it might be quite artistic. Fitting, too, for a young playwright. Well-groomed beards are in fashion now."

He spent the next three weeks growing a beard. That was about all he did—lie on the couch in his downstairs study and let his beard grow.

He neglected to work on his play. But that was all right, he hadn't worked on his play for months—in fact, since he had married Leona a year and a half ago. There wasn't any particular need to, and Leona didn't mind. She could still haul him around to her friends' parties and show him off as her husband, the playwright. He had had a play produced once. He could write

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or not, as he pleased; his main duty, as far as Leona was concerned, was to be witty and charming at social functions so that she would be the envy of the ladies of her social set who had lost husbands, never snagged them, or become bored with the ones they had.

So long as he was punctilious about this duty his time was his own, and Leona would continue to replenish the fairly sizeable sum she had deposited in his bank account at the time of their marriage.

So John lay around, letting his beard grow, and thinking of Francie— and the month of April passed.

The costume-maker knew John professionally—he had become acquainted with him during the years before his marriage when John was doing little-theater writing and acting in San Francisco. The costume-maker worked from his fusty old flat on Fulton Street, near the Park. He was over 70, retired, cantankerous, solitary, and he hated radio, TV, and newspapers.

He had John sit on a chair that had been old when John was born, then he turned a bright light on him and with thumb and forefinger twisted John's bearded face this way and that. "Yes, I can duplicate it."

"Exact shade and everything?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"And no danger it would fa off? I mean if, say, a woma should stroke it?"

"If a woman yanked at it sh could pull it off. Not otherwise."

John had three modeling sit tings, and then he had his fals beard, an exact duplicate of th one that sprouted naturally fron his chin and cheeks, with plenty of adhesive material and clea instructions as to how to put i on and take it off.

He drove back to Marlborough which was the town in which Leona had lived for more than 20 years, since her first marriage (which had ended five years ago with the death of her first husband, whose heart had not been able to take the excitement of accumulating several millio dollars.) The house was a reasonably tasteful pink stone one, two stories, on a good street of widely scattered demi-estates. There were no servants. Leona enjoyed doing her own housework, charging about with vacuum cleaner and mop, slashing rosebushes in the back yard, and preparing large and uneventful meals in the modern electric kitchen.

John parked the foreign sports car she had given him as a wedding present next to her three-year-old convertible. She was hosing the walk. She greeted him amiably, not suspicious or even

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much interested as to where he had spent the day. His time was his own—except for duty time. She wasn't worried about him. She knew that he was too aware of the good things that had come into his life to jeopardize them by uncircumspect behavior. A little hanky-panky on the side—she could tolerate it, if it came to that. But nothing serious—no scandal, nothing for her friends to giggle about behind her back. She trusted John; she knew that whatever he did would be done with discretion.

She watched him go into the house, a small light-boned man, brown-eyed, graceful in his impeccable jacket and slacks, with his soft brown hair and beard—she smiled, considering her good fortune. Who would have imagined that at 45 she could have run down such a good-looking young one?

On May 4th John drove to a two-story modern apartment building in Pine City, 15 miles south of Marlborough on the San Francisco Peninsula. There was a swimming pool, and some lithe brown bodies, male and female, were attractively arranged around it.

John looked approvingly and some of the females looked approvingly back at this slim, neat, attractively bearded young man who had appeared at the entrance to the enclosed court area.

John found the door marked Manager and knocked. A fiftyish man in khaki shorts, with lean muscular arms and legs and a potbelly, appeared.

John said, "You have an apartment for rent?"

"I do. Number Twenty-nine."

It was on the upper floor, off an open balcony that looked over the court area and pool. Furnished, one bedroom, modern kitchen—no children or pets, said the manager.

John asked the rent. They returned to the manager's apartment to complete the deal.

The manager said, "Just you and the wife, huh?" He had noted John's wedding ring.

"That's right. She's a TV actress, on location in Los Angeles."

"Really? That's interesting. We have all kinds of interesting young people here. Airline stewardesses, nurses, a few medical students, advertising men, salesmen—we're a real lively bunch." He winked.

John made an appreciative sound and took cash from his wallet.

The manager, potbelly resting against his desk, peered at his receipt pad, pen poised. "Name?"

"John Watson."

"And your wife's name? That's for the label on the mailbox."

John hesitated. "She goes under the name of Francie Scott."

"Scott?"

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"Yes. That's her stage name." John put a cigarette in his lips, frowning down at the match he held to it.

The manager eyed him. "Does she use the name Watson at all?"

"Well, not very often."

"I see." The ballpoint tapped the desk. "It's just that it might look a little funny on the mailbox—John Watson and Francie Scott, in the same apartment. Couldn't we call you John and Francie Watson?"

"Well—she might miss some mail that way."

"Then how about John Watson and Francie Scott Watson?"

John shrugged. "All right. If you want it that way."

The problem solved, the manager got up and gave John keys. He was now expansive, the genial host. "Have a shot." He got a bottle and glasses.

"What do *you* do, Mr. Watson? You in TV too?"

"No, I sell dental supplies. I'm on the road quite a lot."

They finished their drinks. The manager said, "Come on out. I'll introduce you around."

John looked at his watch. "Thanks, but I've got to run. I have an appointment."

The manager stood at his door, looking after John. One of the men by the pool drifted over. "New tenant, Burt?"

"Yeah. Nice clothes, huh? That lad's got loot."

"What's his name?"

"Says it's Watson, so it's Watson as far as I'm concerned. Says he's a salesman. Moving in with his wife, only she isn't."

"How do you know?"

"I know." He winked. "I've been in this business too long. She's some chick he has on the side. It's all right with me as long as he keeps it quiet. That's all I ask of all you sharpshooters. Just don't embarrass me and I won't embarrass you. Okay?"

The young man, laughing loudly, clapped Burt on the back. "You're all right, Burt, you know it?"

Francie moved in during the next week. A cab brought her, toward evening. The cabman helped her up with her several bags. Burt, the manager, emerged from his apartment to greet her. Her gloved hand accepted his, but was removed immediately. Her voice, her looks, were, he thought, pleasant but cool. She was nicely dressed, wearing a light gray coat; her shoes were also gray. She wore dark sunglasses. Her auburn hair had a reddish tinge. The luggage handled by the cabman looked expensive; plainly, Francie Scott or Francie Watson or whatever her name was had money beind her.

Burt's initial impression of her was Class; he was anxious to see her in a swim suit. She could

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be, he thought, one of the apartment house's brightest lights.

The following day, as the tribe began to gather at the water's edge, Burt padded up to Number 29 in his habitual shorts and rope sandals, and knocked.

"Come in."

The record player was on—something, Burt noted with dismay, jangling and electronic. She sat with a book. He couldn't see the title, but the bulk was formidable. She wore flowing, long-sleeved green pajamas that had come from no bargain counter. The reddish-tinged hair was arranged just so. What was that in the cup beside her on the low table? Tea?

Her gaze was cool. He realized that her lightly mascaraed eyes were green.

He said, "The gang's down by the pool. They'd like to meet you."

"Thank you, but it's impossible for me to take much sun." The shades were adjusted to cut most of it out of the apartment.

"Really?"

"Yes." She did not elaborate.

Burt knew a cold shoulder when he encountered one. "Well, maybe another time, okay?"

At the pool he hunched his shoulders, rubbed his hands together, and said, "Brrr!"

Jackie, the sharpshooter, said, "What's the matter, Burt?"

"Got a chill from Number Twenty-nine. Pour me some medication."

He downed the medication, licked his lips, and said, "I guess we can scratch that chick from our fun-and-games. She's what they call the aloof type."

Jackie winked. "Maybe I can thaw her."

"Leave her alone," said a blonde girl, who loved Jackie with a purple passion that was occasionally and casually requited. "If she doesn't want us we don't want her."

Burt nodded. "Them's my sentiments. The guy seems decent, but she's a cold fish. And who needs cold fish? We got plenty of warm fish around here!" And he beamed at them—he, Burt, grand sachem of this tribe of enlightened Good Guys.

The following Sunday morning Jackie, a little boiled on bloody Marys, took it into his head to pay the new tenant a call. Francie's aloofness intrigued him. Don't judge a book by its cover, and all that... He knocked. The door opened. The nude upper half of John came around it.

Jackie blinked at the brown bearded face. "Oh. 'Scuse me. You must be the husband."

John nodded pleasantly.

"I'm Jackie." Hands met. John's grip was cordial.

"Sorry to disturb you. I wonder if you have any—any coffee."

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"One second." John disappeared, calling, "Francie?"

"What?"

"Where do we keep the coffee?"

"First cupboard left, top shelf."

John appeared, again the top half of him, a slice of bare hip showing around the edge of the door. Jackie accepted the coffee. "I only need a little."

"Take the whole thing, it's almost empty. We have more."

"Well—thanks."

Jackie said later to Burt, in the manager's apartment, over more bloody Marys, "He's an all right guy. I broke up a bit of lovemaking—"

"Really?"

"Well, I assume so. He didn't have any clothes on. But he was okay. Really, a very cordial guy."

That became the opinion of John, who would be seen infrequently, coming and going. He didn't join the poolside revelry, but he was always pleasant. His chilled wife—if she *was* his wife, which no one believed for a moment—seemed to have no effect on his own temperature.

Had Francie been a regular daily tenant, Jackie and the others might have tried to break through the chill. But she came and went. Three or four days might elapse before she would be seen again. A cab would come, and she, with one light bag, would enter, or leave. Whether or not she was a TV actress it was obvious that she had some occupation. She was not a bored young mistress, potentially vulnerable. She had no need or even any desire, obviously, for the bronzed young male cupcakes who decorated the environs of what they themselves jovially referred to as Burt Wozzen's Stud Farm.

So the month of May and most of June passed.

On June 27th John parked his foreign sports car and climbed up to Apartment 29. He took off his jacket, got a broom and a vacuum cleaner from the closet, and set to work.

After vacuuming he took books, records, and magazines from their various racks, piled them on the floor, and began to dust them with a damp cloth.

The door was open. Burt appeared. "Cleaning up, hey?" he said perceptively.

John admitted it.

"You do a real house-cleaning when you do it."

Burt watched a bit, then asked, "Why the big surge of activity?"

John shrugged, then smiled tightly. "It may be that we won't be here much longer."

"Oh?"

"Yes . . . I hate to leave a place a mess."

"Well, I'll be sorry to see you leave." He wouldn't, really. John was all right, but Francie—he

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wouldn't be sorry to see *her* leave. It would make room for a live one.

John said, "We're paid up, aren't we?"

"The place is yours for another week. Look, most people don't go to this much trouble. Let me give you a hand."

John smiled. "I'd be grateful."

For the next hour they did a thorough cleaning of the entire apartment. Burt talked. He slid questions into his chatter. John, always courteous, answered obliquely or vaguely. But Burt was able to tell Jackie later that afternoon, "They're splitting. They aren't married—I knew that all along, of course. She may be in TV or she may not—he doesn't really know. Apparently he met her in a bar in San Francisco. He's beginning to wonder a lot of things about her. He says that lately she's been talking about something that scares him—he wonders if she might be a little nuts. He wouldn't tell me what it was but he indicated pretty clearly he's ready to wind the whole thing up."

Jackie drew a breath, glancing down with satisfaction at the bulge of his golden-brown pectoral muscles. "Well, I don't know. I think there's hidden fire there. I'd like to have struck a match."

Jackie considered that he knew just about all there was to know about women.

San Vicente is a town eight miles north of Marlborough. The southbound train stops there at 11:15 P.M. That evening as it came clanging up, Francie, carrying one light bag, boarded it. She took a rear seat in a nearly empty car. She smoked three cigarettes, gazing out the window; then the Pine City depot came into view. She got off.

A cab was hovering. She flagged it. The driver said, "Hi, Miss."

She nodded briefly.

"Usual place?"

"Yes."

He took her to the apartment.

She said, "Wait for me. I think I'll go out for a snack."

The cabman idled the motor for ten minutes, while the meter clicked off dime after dime. Then he heard the slam of a door and a swift clatter of heels. She came into sight, carrying the bag.

He opened the door from the inside. The girl was breathing heavily. She crouched in a corner of the rear seat, staring ahead.

"Where to now, Miss?"

"What? Oh. Marlborough."

"Marlborough?"

"Yes." She jabbed a cigarette into her lips and murmured, "All over, is it? Well, it'll be all over all right!"

"Miss?"

"Nothing. Just drive, will you?"

He gave her a peculiar look, then slipped into gear and headed for the freeway.

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John Wendle came out of his study. He wore shirt and slacks; his face was pallid.

He went to the front door, opened it, and reached around the edge of it to ring the doorbell.

There was no sound from upstairs.

He rang again.

Leona's voice came from upstairs. "John? Are you answering the door?"

He waited, silent.

Her voice again, booming: "John! Are you home?"

He heard her slippered feet padding toward the stairs.

He stood there, his right hand slightly behind him, as first her slippers, then her ankles, then her bathrobe appeared—and finally her shoulders and face. Her sleep-rumpled face, the small blue eyes peering—

"John! Is that you?"

He moved toward her, hand still behind his hip.

"Now why in the world did you start ringing the bell—"

He was at the bottom of the stairs now. She was six stairs up. Now he raised his right hand. Her eyes darted to the gleaming .22 pistol in his hand, but before her mind could register what it was he squeezed the trigger.

Her face seemed to empty. She was falling slowly, heavily, twisting. He fired again.

Then, for a long time, he stood at the front door, listening. There was a house across the street—the only house nearby. Mr. Holman, a retired attorney and widower—a man who was regular in his habits—lived in it. He was always asleep by 11:00, in his bedroom at the rear of the house.

There was no light, no sound from across the street. Mr. Holman slept.

John looked at his watch. 1:57.

He went into his study and took from the desk a carboard box in which he put a number of items, including some cosmetics; he carried this box through the house to the back yard, then spent some time digging in various places in the soft earth around the rosebushes, burying the items separately. When he finally returned to the house and carefully washed the earth from his hands his watch showed 2:28.

Stepping over the body of his dead wife John Wendle went upstairs to his bedroom, put on his pajamas, and went to bed.

He lay there, staring at the window, until it became light.

At 7:30 John got up, put on a bathrobe and slippers, and went into the study. He came out with the .22. He went to the front door and opened it partly. Turning, he leveled the .22 and fired two shots into the body of Leona.

He stood there a few moments. Then, the gun hanging from his hand, he went out the front door.

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Mr. Holman, a piece of toast n his hand, was peering out of is front window.

John walked steadily up the steps to the Holman door and ang.

Mr. Holman said sharply hrough the door, "What is it, Wendle? Why do you have a gun n your hand?"

"I just shot my wife."

"What!"

"Call the police, please. I just shot my wife."

"Wait there, now! Wait there!"

"I'll wait," John said. "I just shot Leona."

He heard Mr. Holman rush away from the door. Then he heard the dialing of the phone. John sat down on the steps, the gun in his lap. He was sitting there when the police arrived.

At the Police Station Detective-Captain Mills conducted the interrogation.

"Why'd you do it, Mr. Wendle? What was your motive?"

"Well, she had the money, you see, and there were always quarrels about it. I just had enough of it. It started this morning again when she called me a worthless deadbeat. I couldn't stand any more of it. I ran to my study and got the gun and shot her."

"How many times?"

"Oh, three or four, I don't know."

"We don't have the medical report yet, but apparently there were a number of wounds. But Mr. Holman across the street says he heard only two shots."

"Really?" John frowned. "I—I don't know. I was in a daze."

The detective rubbed his mouth speculatively, then shrugged. "Okay. Now—how long have you had the gun?"

"A couple of months."

"Why did you buy it?"

"Why? Well, I suppose I had it in my mind to kill her."

The detective said confidentially, "She's a lot older than you."

"Yes."

"Was there a woman involved, Wendle? Another woman?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Of course." His eyes met the detective's momentarily, then flickered away.

Mills said, "Well—we'll leave that for the moment. You realize you've just made a confession of murder."

"Yes."

"You'll sign it?"

"Yes, I'll sign it."

Mills went to the front office of the modernistic station where photographers from all the Bay Area newspapers and TV studios were waiting. Murder in Marlborough, where so much of San Francisco's high society lives, is always Big News.

The Captain said, "Okay, boys.

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Please keep it orderly and no standing on the furniture. I'll bring him out."

Which he did. John, somewhat drawn, but composed and courteous, allowed himself to be photographed from numerous angles.

Then he was led off to a cell, under the station.

He lay down on the cot and fell sound asleep.

Mills came down to his cell. He looked grim. "Wendle, you're lying."

John stared at him.

"Your wife wasn't killed this morning. She was killed last night."

"No," John said. "You heard Holman's testimony. I killed her this morning."

"Autopsy shows that your wife died no later than three o'clock last night. She died either of a bullet in the abdomen or in the heart—either wound could have been fatal. She had two other wounds in her body—both of them fired long after she was dead."

He gazed steadily at John. "Those last two wounds were the ones you made this morning. They were the ones Holman heard."

John, after a long silence, said, "All right. It's true. I killed her last night, at about two o'clock. Then I fired the two shots this morning."

"Why?"

"To be sure she was dead."

The Captain scowled. "Com off it, Wendle! Do you expe me to believe that?"

John spread his hands. "Wha do you want me to say?"

"The truth."

"I'm telling you the truth."

The Captain said harshly "Who's the woman, Wendle?"

"What woman?"

"We found a woman's suitcas in your study. Full of clothes."

"My wife's," John said quickly

Not those clothes. Your wife could never begin to fit into them. Whose are they, Wendle?"

John didn't answer. Mills said, "You're protecting some woman. Your car was found in the parking lot at the San Vicente depot Who drove it there?"

John, after a few moments, said, "I did."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Last night."

"How'd you get home?"

"I took a cab—no, I walked."

"Drove your car eight miles to the depot, parked it there, then walked home, hey?" The detective shook his head. "You're just being silly, Wendle!"

John stood up. He said loudly, "Damn it, Captain, what do you want of me? I've confessed, haven't I? You've got your case."

"I thought so this morning." He leaned forward. "Who's the other woman?"

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"There isn't any other woman."

"All right." Mills stood up. We'll find her. And when we lo I think it'll all add up."

He went upstairs to his office. The Sergeant who shared it with him was on the phone, writing on a pad. "Yeah . . . yeah . . . okay."

He looked at the Captain with mapping eyes. "A break. A guy down in Pine City, an apartment-house manager named Burt Wozzen, recognized the picture of Wendle on TV."

"So?"

"So Wendle has been shacking up in that apartment house with a broad named Francie Scott."

The Captain sucked in his breath, then let it out. "You don't say? Well, let's go, Sergeant, Let's go see Mr. Wozzen"

Burt Wozzen said, as he unlocked the door to Apartment 29, "I saw his picture on TV and I had to call you. I sure as hell don't like the bad publicity for the apartment house, but I know he didn't do it. He's not the type. Then there's the fact that *she* came in late last night. I heard something smash and then she slammed right out."

"Really? What time?"

"About midnight."

"Came in and went out, hey? And never came back?"

"Not to my knowledge."

The Sergeant pointed. "There's a busted floor lamp. That's what you must have heard smash."

"Right," said Mills. "And there's something else—some torn-up paper."

He stooped, picked up fragments of paper, and spread them on a low table. "Hmm." He made adjustments; the others watched him as he worked out the jigsaw.

"Hah. Here it is." And slowly he began to read:

Francie: Don't think of it. It's too appalling. What gave you that idea? *Of course* I don't love Leona; she knows that as well as you do. But we made a bargain when we got married and she's kept up her end. I intend to keep up mine. When you speak of the possibility of *getting rid* of her, my mind just goes numb. I wonder what might be happening inside *your* mind.

I think it might be good if you went away for a while—perhaps back east. Where is it you're from—Philadelphia? Why not go back there? Perhaps the excitement, the easy living has, in a sense, been too much for you. I think if you get out of this atmosphere for a while you'll be able to think clearly again.

Think it over. I'll come down to the apartment this week-end as usual, and we'll talk then. I'll have money, all you'll need for the trip back east. Please be

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reasonable and constructive in your thinking. Believe me, everything has to end sometime.

John

The Sergeant whistled. "That's evidence, Captain."

"It sure is. He left it for her, she read it, blew her cork, threw down the lamp, tore up the note, rushed out . . . Okay, Wozzen." He took out his notebook.

The manager said, "Call me Burt. Everybody does."

"Okay, Burt. Tell us about John and Francie."

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything—everything you can tell us."

The Captain worked hard that afternoon, talked to a number of tenants of the apartment house, and some cab drivers, and got more and more cheerful.

At about 7:00 P.M. he arrived in John's cell, holding something behind his back. "Okay, Wendle. Let's talk about Francie Scott."

John looked at him stonily.

The Captain revealed what he had behind his back—a framed picture of John inscribed: *All love to Francie from John.*

"It was in the bedroom of the apartment in Pine City. Nothing to say?"

John shook his head.

"We found the note you left her . . . This is how we reconstruct it. She read the note, blew her top, got a cab to drive her to Marlborough—we've got the driver's story—and he dropped her off at Raven Road at about 1:00 P.M. Raven Road—no more than a hundred yards from your house."

John sat motionless, his eyes fixed on him.

"She walked up to the house. She had your gun—"

"How?" John's voice was stiff. "How would she get it?"

"I don't know, you tell me. I have a hunch the gun was for her, anyway. We have the picture of an attractive, kind of peculiar woman who traveled around a lot. I think that was why you bought the gun—to give to her for protection. Anyway, let me go on. She rang the bell, your wife answered. They argued. Francie pulled the gun and shot her. Then shot her again as your wife was falling. Isn't that the way it was?"

John said, "How would I know? I was—"

The Captain pounced. "Asleep? You were asleep? Yes, but you heard the shots, jumped up, ran to the stairs, and saw what had happened."

Mills paced. "I can see it clearly. You knew they'd arrest her, put her away—but there was still a chance to save her. If you could buy some time, give her some running room—you'd take the heat until she got away."

"Noble of me," John said sarcastically. "If you really *did* read

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hat note you'd know I didn't love ıer that much."

"I've considered that. You're ıoble—up to a point. The thing s, if the heat gets *too* strong ou can always tell the real story, ell all about Francie. What you vere after was time—time for her o get away. Well, I'll hand it o you—you accomplished it."

John sighed. "It's wonderful to have an imagination. You really ought to write fiction."

"No, I'm happy as a detective." The Captain smiled. "The two shots you fired this morning, heard by a witness, were masterful—they eliminated right then and there the thought of *anyone else* being involved. Until we got the medical report, of course. By that time Francie was long gone. You'd given her the keys to your car and she drove it to San Vicente and caught the 2:37 train to San Francisco."

"Really. Are there witnesses who saw her?"

"Not yet. But it's the only explanation for the car left at the depot . . . Then there's something else. The suitcase in your study contained a gray dress, gray coat, gray shoes—that's the outfit the cab driver described her as wearing."

John, after a pause, said, "You mystify me. What's your deduction?"

"She knew that if we got on her trail early, she might be recognized in those duds. She had another outfit in the suitcase, of course."

"Why didn't she take the suitcase with her?"

"Same reason. It might be remembered and cause her to be recognized."

John shook his head. "Captain, it's beautiful—a beautiful reconstruction. But the plain fact is that I'm the one who murdered Leona. Francie *did* appear at the house last night, yes—but I killed Leona."

"And why did Francie run away?"

"What?"

"And why did she come to your house at all?"

John shook his head stubbornly. "I killed Leona."

"Would you take a lie detector test?"

"I don't believe I have to, do I?"

"No, you don't." The Captain patted his shoulder. "Okay, Wendle, stick to your story. We'll see which one the Coroner's Jury believes."

An all-points bulletin went out on Francie Scott, who could be accurately described by numerous residents of Burt Wozzen's apartment. Unfortunately there were no photos of her. It was surmised that John had probably destroyed whatever photos he may have had.

Unfortunately also, no in-

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formation as to her background could be gleaned. John steadfastly refused to discuss, with the police or the press, any aspect of his relationship with her—where they had met, what she claimed to have done in her past, how she supported herself, how *he* supported her, what her interests were. All he would say was, "You're on a wild goose chase. There's no need to involve Francie. *I* killed Leona."

The police tried to locate fingerprints of Francie, but found none in the apartment or in the car. As far as the car went, that was understandable—she must have been wearing the gray gloves when she drove to the San Vicente station. But the lack of prints in the apartment was singular—until Burt Wozzen recalled how John and he had cleaned the place from stem to stern the day before the murder.

The search centered, in time, on the Philadelphia area, but no information turned up.

The girl had vanished from the face of the earth.

After the Coroner's Jury, which met three days after the killing, had brought in a verdict against one Francie Scott, the District Attorney considered charging John Wendle with having been an accessory after the fact.

Captain Mills said, "Sure he is. But we could never make it stick. There's no hard evidence. Besides, the papers have made him a kind of hero."

"True."

"Another thing. If we turn him loose, Francie may contact him—she may need money."

So, the third evening after his arrest, John was released—and just in time, he thought, as he retired to his bathroom to detach his false beard and shave. Real hair sprouting under the false hair had caused an itch that was almost unbearable.

He would remain in seclusion, and in a week have the beginning of a real beard—different shape, but enough to cover the soft, almost feminine curve of his lower cheeks.

That night he went out in the back yard, dug up the various items he had planted, and carried them into the house in the cardboard box. He carefully smashed the two tiny bits of green glass to powder on the kitchen sink and flushed the powder down the drain. The unlabeled tube of adhesive material was no special danger; he merely poked it down among empty cans and coffee grounds in the garbage container. The cosmetics he carried upstairs and put in among other things in his late wife's bathroom. The auburn wig he sliced into strips with a sharp kitchen knife, cut the strips into small bits, and flushed them down the toilet.

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He stood at his desk and gazed down at the manuscript of his play. Perhaps he would start work on it soon. If it were produced, if it made him famous, people would ask him if it was his first. Yes, he would say. He would make no mention of the previous play which had run only two week-ends, to no particular acclaim, in a little theater in San Francisco, five years before.

Not that he was ashamed of it. In fact, he thought it was excellent. A comedy of the Theater of the Absurd school, with helter-skelter characters, black humor, random comings and goings . . .

Fortunately the play was long forgotten; and in any case no one would connect it with him, John Wendle. It had been written under a *nom de plume*. And under the same pseudonym he had acted the title role.

One San Francisco critic had given it a brief review:

"As a play, 'The Transvestite' is quite boring and derivative; but whether he is playing Jo-Jo or Jo-Jo's sister, Frank Scott is totally convincing."

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a *NEW* spy-and-counterspy story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

Chronologically, in the undercover career of Mr. Calder, this was an early case—the internal evidence, chiefly canine, proves that. But, like so many affairs of state in which Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens were secret agents, this case also had a fascinating combination of elements: an arrest in Warsaw, an Admiral who was a public hero and fussy about his breakfast eggs, a retired beekeeper (now, don't jump to conclusions!), a beauty salon that was virtually a clearing house of "loose talk," a crime wave in the Petersfield area . . . They all finally merged, intermingled—and exploded . . .

THE EMERGENCY EXIT AFFAIR

by MICHAEL GILBERT

IT WAS SIX O'CLOCK, ON AS FOUL a morning as could be imagined.

In Warsaw it was raining, in the way it rained just before the rain turned to sleet and the sleet to the first snow of winter. The wind from the east lifted the rain and blew it, in a fine spray, down the Grodsky Boulevarde and into Katerina Square. In the far corner of the Square the electric sign of the Hotel Polanska was fighting a losing battle with the early morning light.

A man, dressed in an overcoat which hung nearly to his heels and armed with a long broom, was sweeping down the pavement which fronted the three cafés on the south side of the Square; he looked up from his task. Something was happening at the Hotel Polanska across the way.

The front door jerked open and two uniformed policemen came

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out. They were half carrying, half dragging a man who looked as if he had been pulled out of bed and had not been allowed to put on all his clothes. A police officer raised a gloved hand. A car slid up. The four of them bundled in. The car drove off.

A fresh gust of misty rain blew across the Square. It was as though a motion-picture director had said "Dissolve" and the scene had been wiped out. The Square was once more quiet and empty.

The sweeper rubbed a frayed cuff over his eyes, and bent to his work. He was paid by all three cafés, and if he swept for one better than the others there would be complaints.

When he had finished, he shouldered his broom and shambled off. His course took him past one of the kiosks which sold newspapers and cigarettes. He stopped to have a word with the bearded stall keeper who was taking down the shutters. The man listened, nodding occasionally. Later that morning he himself did some talking, into a telephone.

The news reached an office in Whitehall with the afternoon tea trays and was passed on to Mr. Fortescue, the Manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank, as he was getting ready to catch his train home that evening. The message said, "They've taken Rufus Oldroyd."

Mr. Fortescue considered the matter, standing in front of the fireplace, with its hideous chocolate-colored porcelain mantel. From the expression on his face you might have judged that the account of one of his most trusted customers had gone suddenly into the red.

Nine o'clock, on an autumn morning straight from paradise. The sun, clear of the mist, was full and golden, but not yet giving out much heat. In the drawing room of Craysfoot House a log fire was crackling in the grate, and the smell of percolating coffee was scenting the air.

"Damn the girl," said Admiral Lefroy, "how many times have I told her that I like my eggs boiled for four minutes!"

"I've told her a dozen times," said his wife.

"By the feel of this one it's been boiled for fourteen minutes."

"Give it to Sultan."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. The quickest way to ruin a dog's manners is to feed him at table. You'll have him begging next. Balancing lumps of sugar on his nose."

"When you were in command of a ship, I'm sure you were horrid to all the little midshipmen."

"It isn't a Captain's job to be horrid to midshipmen." The Admiral glared at the official letter he had just opened. "Damn!"

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"What's up now?"

"Got to go to town. The First Sea Lord's called a conference. It's wonderful how busy they manage to keep us, considering we haven't got a navy."

"I'll go with you. We can come back together on Friday afternoon."

"Who have we got this weekend?"

"Your friend, Captain Rowlandson."

"Good."

"And Mrs. Orbiston."

"Oh, God!"

"You'll have to be nice to her. She's on the committee of the Kennel Club. We can't have her blackballing Sultan when he comes up."

Hearing his name, the dog got up from the rug in front of the fire and walked across to Lady Lefroy. He was nine months old, a puppy no longer, but a young dog with plenty of growth to come in his long springy body and barrel chest. A Persian deerhound of royal parentage, he wore the tuft of hair on the top of his head like a coronet. His eyes, which had been light yellow at birth, were deepening now into amber. His nose was blue-black, his skin the color of honey.

Lady Lefroy tickled the top of his head and said, "Sorry, no scraps for you." And to her husband, "I forgot. There's one more. Mr. Behrens."

"Who's he?"

"You ought to know. You invited him."

"Oh, the bee chap. Yes. I met him at my club. He's written a book about them. Knows a lot about medieval armor, too."

"He can go for nice long walks with Mrs. Orbiston and talk to her about hives and helmets."

Admiral Lefroy abandoned the egg in disgust, and started on the toast and marmalade. He said, "What are you planning to do up in town?"

"Shopping, and having my hair done."

"By—what's the fellow's name—Michael?"

"Who else? And what are you snorting about?"

"You know damned well what I'm snorting about."

"Now, Alaric . . . Michael is adorable. The things he says! Do you know what he told Lady Skeffington last week?"

"I'm not the least interested in what he told Lady Skeffington."

The beauty salon was in two sections. The front had plush settees, low tables covered with glossy magazines, a thick carpet, and indirect lighting. At the back was a row of cubicles, with plain white wooden doors. On each door was the word *Michael's* in letters of brass script, and under each word the stylized painting of a different flower.

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From behind the cubicles the snipping of scissors, the sudden gushing of water as a spray was turned on, the humming of a hair dryer. From in front, the hum of conversation. Mrs. Hetherington, county to the oblong ends of her brown shoes, was saying to Lady Lefroy, "So *she* said, when they have the next Cabinet reshuffle, Tom's been promised the Navy. Michael said—with a perfectly straight face—'What'll he do with it when he gets it? Play with it in his bath?' "

A Mrs. Toop, who was nobody in particular, and knew it, giggled sycophantically. Lady Lefroy, who had heard the story before, said, "Oh. What did she say?"

"Of course she pretended to be furious. I mean, Michael doesn't bother to be rude to you unless your husband's someone."

How Mrs. Toop wished that Michael would be rude to *her*!

"He goes too far sometimes," said Lady Lefroy. "Did you hear what he said to Lady Skeffington?"

"No. Tell, tell."

"Well, you know how she's always carrying on about her husband's polo. What the Duke said to him and what he said to the Duke—"

"Hold it," said Mrs. Hetherington regretfully.

The door with a chrysanthemum on it opened and Michael came out. He held the door open for Lady Skeffington, gave her a gentle pat on the back as she went past, and said, "There now, Lady S. You look a proper little tart. I 'ope your 'usband likes it."

"He'll hate it," said Lady Skeffington complacently.

"It'll keep his mind off things. You ought to see the cartoon in the *Mirror*."

"I never read the *Mirror*."

"You don't know what you're missing. They've got him to the life. Quintin as the lion, and 'im as the unicorn."

It was noticeable that Michael dealt with his aitches quite arbitrarily, sometimes dropping them, sometimes not. He helped Lady Skeffington into her coat, showed her out, and came back, casting an eye over the waiting victims.

"Come, on Lady L.," He said, "I'll wash your hair for you."

Mrs. Hetherington said, "What about me? I was next."

"Bert can take care of you," said Michael. "He'll be through in Delphinium in 'alf a mo'."

"It's sheer favoritism."

"You know what Mr. Asquith said, 'Favoritism's the secret of efficiency.' "

"It wasn't Asquith," said Mrs. Hetherington coldly. "It was Lord Fisher."

"Lady Marcia Lefroy," said Mr. Fortescue, "is not English at

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all, although to hear her speak you would never guess it. She's a French Lebanese girl, of good family." Mr. Fortescue paused, as though the next words he had to speak were precious, and needed to be weighed out very carefully. "She had been a trained Communist agent since she was sixteen."

The Under-Secretary of State stared at him in blank disbelief. He said, "Really, Fortescue, This sounds like something Security Executive has dreamed up. I've met Lady Lefroy a dozen times. She's an absolutely charming woman."

"She was trained to be charming. In fact, her earliest assignment was to charm Lefroy. He was only a Captain then, in command of our Eastern Mediterranean Cruiser Detachment. Her instructions were to seduce him. However, it served the purpose of her employers equally well when he carried her off and married her."

"This is quite fantastic. Who started this—this canard?"

"It was started by a disgruntled housemaid. She told us that once, when clearing away the coffee cups, she distinctly heard Admiral Lefroy telling his wife something—she was vague what it was but she was sure it was secret."

The Under-Secretary laughed. "And you believed that sort of evidence?"

"On the contrary, we put her down as a bad and spiteful witness. The information was pigeon holed. However, three months ago, when Heinrich Woolf defected to us—you remember—"

"Of course."

"One of the things he told us was that details of our agents in Eastern bloc countries were regularly reaching Moscow via Warsaw. They were known to be coming from the foreign-born wife of a senior Naval Officer with a post in Intelligence. The Lefroys filled the bill exactly. He's the naval representative on the Joint Staffs Intelligence Committee.

"We still didn't believe it, but we had Lady Lefroy watched. And noted that she had her hair—washed and set, I believe, is the right expression—by a fashionable hairdresser who calls himself Michael, speaks with a strong Cockney accent, was born in Lithuania, and has an occasional and inconspicuous rendezvous on Parliament Hill Fields with a Major Shollitov, who drives the Polish Ambassador's spare car."

The Under-Secretary said, "Good God!" and then, "I hope you realize that this is a case where we can't afford—can't possibly afford—to make any mistake."

I can see that it would arouse considerable comment."

"Comment! God in heaven,

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man, it's dynamite. And if it went off the wrong way it could—well it could blow quite a lot of people out of the office."

Mr. Fortescue said in his gentlest voice, "I had not really considered the political angles. My objective is to stop it. You heard they picked up Rufus Oldroyd—"

"Was that—?"

"I imagine so. Admiral Lefroy knew all about Oldroyd. A single incautious word to his wife. The mention of a name even—"

"Yes. I can see that."

"It must be stopped." Mr. Fortescue's eyes were as bleak and gray as the seas which washed his native Hebrides.

The Under-Secretary shifted uncomfortably in his padded chair. He was a Wykehamist. He disliked Intelligence work, its operations, its operators, and all its implications. It was only the accident of the particular seat he occupied at the Foreign Office which had forced him to have anything to do with it.

He said, "Alaric Lefroy's a public hero. Has been ever since he got his V.C. on the Russian convoy. He's a friend of Royalty. He could hardly be removed from the Committee without public explanation. And suppose we were forced—by questions in the House—to *give* an explanation. Could we prove it?"

"At the moment, almost certainly not."

"Then couldn't we pull this fellow Michael in?"

"It would be ineffective. Marcia Lefroy is a professional. She'd lie low for a bit. Then she'd open up a new channel of communication—possibly one we didn't know about. Then we should be worse off."

"I suppose you're right," said the Under-Secretary unhappily. "What are we going to do about it?"

"I had worked out a tentative plan—I could explain the details if you wished—"

The Under-Secretary said hastily that he had no desire to hear the details. He felt confident that the matter could be left entirely in Mr. Fortescue's hands.

Michael was uneasy. The causes of his uneasiness were trivial, but they were cumulative. There had been the trouble with the lock on the front door of his flat. The locksmith who had removed and replaced it had found the tip of a key broken off in the mechanism.

Michael had mentioned the matter to the hall porter, and in doing so had discovered that the regular porter, with whom he was on very good terms, had been replaced by a large and surly-looking individual who had treated him in a very offhand way. And the final straw—there had been the trouble with his car.

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It had been his custom to make his trips to North London in an inconspicuous little Austin runabout. This had gone in for repairs a week ago, and had been promised to him for today. When he went to get the car it was not ready. Mysterious additional faults had developed. There was nothing he could do but use his second car, the extremely conspicuous, primrose-yellow Daimler with the personal license plate.

This he parked, as usual, in the backyard of the Spaniards, and made his way on foot down the complex of paths which led to the open spaces of Parliament Hill Fields. It was an ideal place for a rendezvous, with an almost panoramic view of London. Major Shollitov would come from the opposite direction, leaving his car in Swains Lane, and walking up to the meeting place.

And now, to add to, and cap, all the other doubts which had been nagging him, Major Shollitov was late. Michael, although a very minor player in the game, was sufficiently instructed to realize the significance of this. A rendezvous was always kept with scrupulous punctuality. If one party was late, it was a warning—a warning not to be disregarded. The other party took himself off, quickly and quietly.

Michael glanced at his watch. 2:59. From the seat on which he was sitting he could command all the paths leading up from the Vale. It was one of its advantages. Thirty seconds to go. Major Shollitov was not coming.

When a hand touched him on the shoulder Michael jumped.

The man must have come up across the grass behind him. He was thick-set, middle-aged, and nondescript. He said, "Got a match?"

Michael's heart resumed a more normal rhythm. He said, "Sure."

"Mind if I sit down? Lovely view, isn't it?"

Michael said, "Yes." He wondered how soon he could move. To get straight up and walk off would look rude, and to be rude would attract attention.

The stranger said, "I wonder if you know why they call this spot Parliament Hill Fields?"

"No, I don't."

"You remember that crowd who were planning to blow up Parliament? Fifth of November, sixteen hundred and five. They'd got it all laid out, and were intending to scuttle off up north to start the revolt. And just about here was where they pulled up their horses, to have a view of the fireworks display. Dramatic, wasn't it?"

"Oh, very," said Michael. Give it one more minute.

"Only, as *we* know, the fireworks didn't go off. And they left poor old Guy Fawkes behind

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to carry the can. Interesting, don't you think?"

"Oh, very."

"I thought you'd be interested."

There was something about this last statement that Michael didn't like. He said sharply, "Why should it interest me, particularly?"

"Well," said the stranger, "after all it's much the sort of position you're in now, isn't it?"

The long silence that followed was broken by the distant voices of children playing, out of sight down the slope. At last Michael said, "What are you talking about?"

"Your old pal, Major Shollitov—the one you usually meet here. He's gone scuttling back to Warsaw, leaving you sitting here, like Guy Fawkes, waiting for the rack and thumbscrew."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind about me," said the stranger, with a sudden brutal authority. "Let's talk about you. You're the one who's on the spot. You're a messenger boy for the Commies, aren't you? How did they rope you in? Through your old Mum and Dad in Lithuania? Not that it matters. They've finished with you now. You're blown."

"You're mad."

"If you think I'm mad I'd advise you to shout for help. Go on. There's a park attendant. Give him a yell. Tell him you're being annoyed by a lunatic."

Michael watched the park attendant approach them. He watched him walk away.

The stranger inhaled the last drop of smoke from his cigarette, dropped it, and stamped on it. He said, "You've had an easy run, so far. Listening to high-class tittle-tattle from Lady This, whose husband's in the Cabinet, and Mrs. That whose brother's on the Staff, and passing it on for a few pounds a time. They don't pay much for third class work like that. Well, that's all over now. It's you who's going to do the paying and—" The stranger leaned forward until his face was a few inches from Michael's. "—it's not going to be nice. They get rough, those Intelligence boys. They know what happens to *their* friends when they get caught, and they like a chance to pay a little of it back. The last one they brought in had both his legs broken. Jumping out of a car, *they* said—"

"He's yellow," said Mr. Calder to Mr. Fortescue. "Yellow as a daffodil. By the time I'd finished he was almost crying."

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Fortescue. "Verbal bullies are often lacking in moral stamina. You were careful not to suggest any connection between him and Lady Lefroy?"

"Very careful. I kept it quite

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general. Listening to indiscreet gossip was how I put it."

"Excellent. We must hope that he'll act predictably."

It had not been an easy weekend, even for an experienced hostess like Marcia Lefroy. Captain Rowlandson and Mrs. Orbiston had not mixed well. The only real success had been Mr. Behrens, who had filled in awkward gaps in the conversation with stories about his bees.

The final straw for Lady Lefroy was when her husband telephoned that he had to stay in London. The First Lord had called a conference for early the next day.

Lady Lefroy pondered these things as she lay in bed. Usually she fell asleep immediately after turning off the bedside lamp. Tonight she had not done so. Like all trained and experienced agents she possessed delicate antennas, on the alert for the unusual. It was most unusual for a conference to be called on a Saturday morning. If there had been a crisis of some sort, it would have have been understandable. But the international scene was flat as a pancake. Why then—?

The first handful of gravel against the window jerked her back to full wakefulness. As she got out of bed Sultan growled softly. "It's all right," she said. She struggled into her dressing gown without turning on the light. She made her way downstairs into the drawing room and opened the long window giving onto the terrace. As a man slipped through she adjusted the curtains carefully and switched on a single wall light. When she saw who it was her anger exploded. "How *dare* you come here!"

"I wouldn't have come unless I had to," said Michael sulkily.

"Your instructions were clear. You were absolutely forbidden to write, telephone, or even speak to me, except in your shop."

"But I've got to get out. They're onto me."

"How do you know that?"

"They told me."

"An unusual proceeding," said Lady Lefroy coldly.

"This man, he met me, at the rendezvous. Shollitov's been sent home. He knew all about us."

"*Us*?"

"Well, about me."

"Did he mention my name?"

"Not your name particularly. He accused me of picking up gossip at the salon and passing it on. He made threats. They were going to—to do things to me."

"Have they done anything?"

"Not yet. But they will. I tried to get through—to the emergency number."

"Fool. Your line will be tapped."

"I couldn't, anyway. They said it had been disconnected."

"I see," said Lady Lefroy. It

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was a few moments before she spoke again.

"How did you come down?"

"By car. I'm sure I wasn't followed—I should have known at once. The roads were empty. I hid the car nearly a mile away and walked the rest of the way."

"You showed that much sense." There was no point in panicking him. He was frightened enough already. "What do you want?"

"Help. To get out."

"What makes you think I can help you?"

"You know the ropes. They told me that if I ever had to clear out I was to come to you."

"Then," said Lady Lefroy, "I must see what I can do." She walked across to her desk. As she did so, the door was pushed open. Her heart missed a beat, then steadied. It was Sultan.

"That's very naughty of you," she said. "I told you to stay put."

Sultan yawned. He wanted the man to go so that they could get back to bed.

Lady Lefroy unlocked the desk, and than a steel-lined drawer inside. From it she took a bulky packet which she weighed thoughtfully in her hand. She said, "You see this. It was left with me against such a contingency. But before I give it to you I must have your promise to use it exactly in the way I tell you."

"Of course. What is it?"

"It's called 'Emergency Exit.' Inside you'll find a passport. The photograph resembles you sufficiently. You'll have to make a few small changes. Arrange your hair differently. That should be easy enough for a man of your talents." A smile twitched the corner of Lady Lefroy's mouth. "And wear glasses. You'll find them in the packet too. There's a wad of French and German money, and instructions as to what you're to do when you get to Cologne. From there you'll be flying to Berlin. There's a second passport to use in Berlin, and a second set of instructions. After you open the packet—which you're not to do until you're back in London—all instructions are to be learned by heart and then destroyed. And the first passport is to be destroyed when you reach Cologne. Is that all clear?"

Michael let his breath out with a soft sigh. "All clear," he said. "And thank you."

"A final word. *These things aren't issued in duplicate.* So look after it carefully."

Michael made an unsuccessful attempt to stow the bulky oilskin-covered packet in his coat pocket. Lady Lefroy took it from him. She said, "Open the front of your shirt. That's right. Stow it down there. Now button it up again. Right. Don't open the curtains until I've turned the light off."

She stood for a few moments after Michael had gone. She was

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taut as a violin string. The young dog, crouched at her feet, sensed it and growled, low in his throat. The sound broke the tension.

"All right," said Lady Lefroy. "Back to bed. Nothing more to worry about."

Among other irritating habits Mrs. Orbiston was accustomed to turning on her portable radio for the seven o'clock news, and retailing the choicer items to the company at breakfast. Lady Lefroy had not appeared, so her audience consisted of Captain Rowlandson, who was never fully awake until he had finished his after-breakfast pipe, and Mr. Behrens whose mind appeared to be elsewhere.

"Burglars," she announced. "Stole jewelry worth fifteen thousand pounds. At Greystone House. That's not far from here, is it?"

"I've no idea," said Captain Rowlandson.

"Well, I'm sure it is nearby. Because the people were called Baynes, and I've heard Marcia talk about them."

"Serve them right. When you go away you ought to put your jewelry in the bank."

"That's just it. That's what made it so terrible. The men went *into* their bedroom, *while* they were there, and helped themselves to the jewel box *off* the dressing table. It makes your flesh creep. I was just saying, Marcia—"

"If it's the Bayneses you're talking about," said Lady Lefroy, who had come into the room at that moment, "I've just heard. Mary Baynes was on the telephone."

"One good thing," said Captain Rowlandson, "they wouldn't get away with it here. Sultan would see them off."

"He's a very light sleeper," agreed Lady Lefroy. "All the same, I can't help thinking that it might be better if he *didn't* give the alarm."

"Oh—why?"

"I gather these burglars are pretty desperate characters. And all my stuff is well insured."

"That's pure defeatism, Marcia. Don't you agree, Behrens?"

Mr. Behrens said, "Defeatism might be preferable to being shot."

Mrs. Orbiston, seeing the conversation drifting away from her, pulled it back sharply. She said, "And that wasn't the *only* exciting thing that happened in this part of country. Roysters Cross is quite close to here, too, isn't it?"

"About four miles away," said Lady Lefroy. "Why?"

"There was a terrible accident there last night. A man blew himself up."

"Blew himself up?"

"That's what the news commentator said."

"Curious way of committing

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suicide,'' said Captain Rowlandson.

"The possibility of accident has not been ruled out."

"You can't very well blow yourself up by accident," said Mr. Behrens. "That is, unless you're carrying some sort of bomb."

"Perhaps it was a tire blow-out," said Lady Lefroy. "Would you mind passing the marmalade?"

"It didn't sound like a tire blow-out. They said the man *and* the car were blown to bits."

"Amatol or dextrol," said Mr. Calder. "Or just possibly good old-fashioned nitroglycerine, although that's got rather a detectable smell."

"What sort of fuse?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Something silent. Wire and acid?"

"Very likely," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "It's notoriously inaccurate. I've no doubt the thing was intended to go off a lot further away from Lady Lefroy's house. Or maybe he took longer to walk back to his car than she anticipated. How do you think she arranged it?"

"I imagine it was something she gave him to take back to London. A parcel of some sort."

"The whole thing," said Mr. Fortescue, "is most unfortunate. Michael was responding nicely to treatment. He would soon have been ready to cooperate."

"Evidently Marcia thought so, too."

"It demonstrates what we have always suspected—that she's a ruthless and unscrupulous woman."

''It demonstrates something else, too," said Mr. Calder. "If she tumbled to what we were doing—twisting Michael's tail so hard that he'd incriminate her—she must have suspected that we were onto her as well."

Mr. Fortescue said, "Hmm: Maybe."

"Not certain, I agree. But a workable assumption. And if it's true it must mean that she's decided to stay put and brazen it out. Because if she had decided to quit she'd have kept Michael on ice for a day or two, while she made all *her* preparations."

"It's not a happy conclusion, Calder."

"It's a very unhappy conclusion. Now that she's been warned she'll sever all her contacts and lie low for a very long time. Possibly forever."

"It would, I suppose, be a half-way solution," said Mr. Fortescue. He didn't sound very happy about it. "All the same, I don't think it's a chance we can take. Do you?"

"No," said Mr. Calder. "I don't." He added, "I read in the papers that there'd been another burglary down in the Petersfield

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area. It's some sort of gang. The police say that they're armed, and dangerous. They've put out a warning to all householders in the neighborhood."

Mr. Fortescue thought about this for a long time. Then he said, "Yes. I think that would be best. It'll mean keeping the Admiral up in London for another night. I'll get the Minister to reconvene the Conference."

"How's he going to get away with that one? He can't keep Senior Admirals and Generals in London on a Sunday. Not in peacetime."

"Then we'll have to declare war on someone," said Mr. Fortescue.

Marcia sat up in bed and said, "Stop it, Sultan. What's the matter with you?"

It had been a savage growl—no gentle rumbling warning, but a note of imminent danger.

The moon, cloud-wracked, was throwing a gray light into the room. As her sight adjusted itself, Marcia could dimly see the figure at which Sulton was snarling.

She twisted one hand into his collar, and with the other she switched on the bed-table lamp. A man was standing beside the dressing table, examining an opened jewel case. He put the case down and said, "If you don't keep that dog under control I shall have to shoot him. It won't make a lot of noise, because this gun's silenced, but I'd hate to have to mess up a nice animal like that."

"If that jewel case interests you, you're welcome to it. It's got nothing but costume jewelry in it—stop it, Sulton—worth twenty-five pounds if you're lucky."

"And insured for five hundred, I don't doubt," said the intruder. "I'm not really interested in jewelry. That's just an excuse for meeting you. I wanted to get your version of what happened to Michael last night."

"Michael? Michael who?"

"The Michael who's been doing your hair for the last eighteen months. You can't have forgotten about him already. They've only just finished scraping bits of him off the signpost at Roysters Cross. That must have been a powerful bit of stuff you put in the packet you gave him."

"I've no idea what you're talking about," said Lady Lefroy. Her voice gave nothing away. Only her eyes were thoughtful, and the knuckles of the hand which held Sultan's collar showed white.

The door opened quietly. Calder's colleague, Mr. Behrens, looked in.

"You've come just at the right moment," said the first intruder. "Have you got the tape?"

"I have it," said Mr. Behrens, "and a recorder. I had to wire three rooms to be sure of getting it."

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Lady Lefroy's look had hardened. She moved her head slowly, trying to sum up both men, to weigh this new development. It was the reaction of a professional, faced by a threat from a new quarter.

"You know each other, I see."

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Behrens. "Calder and I have known each other for twenty years. Or is it twenty five? Time goes so quickly when you're interested in your work."

"So you're in this together."

"We often work as a team."

"You do the snooping and sneaking, and he does the rough stuff."

"Exactly," said Mr. Behrens. "We find it an excellent arrangement." He was busy with the tape recorder. "Now perhaps we can convince you we're not bluffing. Where shall we start?"

There was a click, and they heard Lady Lefroy's voice say, "It's called 'Emergency Exit.' Inside you'll find a passport—" They listened in silence for a full minute. "Open the front of your shirt. That's right. Stow it down there—"

Mr. Behrens turned the machine off.

"A nice touch," he said. "It must have been resting on his stomach when it went off. No wonder there wasn't much of him left."

Lady Lefroy said, "That tape recording proves nothing. You say it's my voice. I say it's a clumsy fake. It doesn't even sound much like me."

"You musn't forget that I saw Michael, both coming and going."

"Lies! Why do you bother me with such lies?" Again her eyes turned from one man to the other. She was trying to estimate which of them was the stronger character, which one she should attack, what weapons in her well-stocked armory she should use. It was confusing to have to deal with two at once.

In the end she said, with a well-contrived yawn, "Do I understand that this is all leading up to something? That you have some proposal to put to me? If so, please put it, so that I can get back to sleep."

"Our proposal," said Mr. Calder, "is this. If you will make a written statement, naming your employers, and your contacts, giving full details which can be verified in forty-eight hours, we'll give you the same length of time to get out of the country."

"We feel certain," said Mr. Behrens, "that you have all *your* arrangements made."

"More efficient, if less drastic, than the ones you made for Michael."

All expression had gone out of Lady Lefroy's face. It was a mask—a meticulously constructed mask behind which a quick brain

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weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. When she smiled, Mr. Behrens knew that they had lost.

"You're bluffing," she said. "I call your bluff. Go away."

"A pity," said Mr. Behrens.

"Very disappointing," said Mr. Calder. "We shall have to use plan Number Two."

"You do understand," said Mr. Behrens earnestly, "that you've brought this on yourself. We have no alternative."

Lady Lefroy said nothing. There was something here she found disturbing.

Mr. Calder said, "It's this gang of burglars, you see. Armed burglars. They've been breaking into houses round here. Tonight they turned their attention to this house. You woke up and caught one of them rifling your jewel case."

"And what happened then?"

"Then," said Mr. Calder, "he shot you."

Three things happened together: a scream from Marcia Lefroy, cut short; the resonant twang of the silenced automatic pistol; and a snarl of fury as the dog went for Mr. Calder's throat.

Mr. Behrens moved almost as quickly as the dog. He caught up the two corners of the blanket on which the dog had been lying and enveloped him in it, a growling writhing, murderous bundle. Mr. Calder dropped his gun, grabbed the other two corners of the blanket, knotted them together.

"It was unpardonable," said Mr. Fortescue.

"I know," said Mr. Calder. "But—"

"There are no 'buts' about it. It was an unnecessary complication, and a quite unjustifiable risk. Suppose he is recognized."

"All Persian deerhounds have a strong family resemblance. Once he's fully grown there'll be no risk at all. I'll rename him of course. I thought that Rasselas might be the appropriate name for an Eastern Prince—"

"I can't approve."

"He's beautifully bred. And he's got all the courage in the world. You should have seen the way he came for me. Straight as an arrow. If Behrens hadn't got the blanket over him, he'd have had my throat for sure. What were we to do?"

"You should have immobolized him."

"You can't immobilize a partly grown deerhound."

"Then you should have shot him."

"Shoot a dog like that," said Mr. Calder. "You must be joking."

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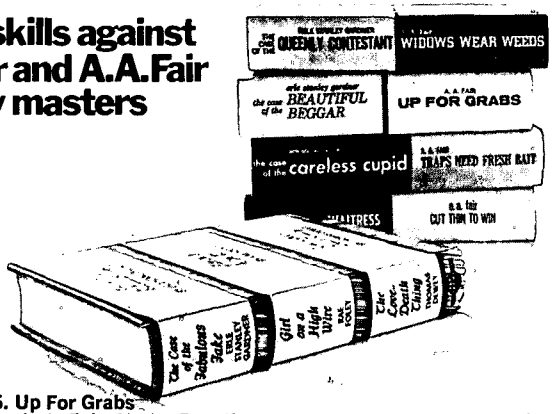
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